LANGUAGE
IN GENERAL EDUCATION

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A REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON
THE FUNCTION OF ENGLISH IN
GENERAL EDUCATION

for the

COMMISSION ON SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

PREFACE

Language in General Education constitutes one volume in the series of publications resulting from the work of the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum of the Progressive Education Association.

This Commission, established in 1932, was charged with the task of examining the fundamental problems of education at the secondary level. Its approach to this task was based on the assumption that education must meet the needs of students in such way as to preserve, enhance, and realize ever more fully the values inherent in the democratic tradition.[1]

This means, in effect, that educational activities must bear some definable relationship to the learner's immediate concerns, for these motivate his conduct and give his life its quality. Unless the activities of the secondary-school curriculum tie in with the prevailing interests and capacities of the adolescent, they are likely either to prove barren or to produce fruits of doubtful worth.

But since the person and his interests and concerns change in the course of experience, the general directions in which education is to lead must somehow be visualized. In the judgment of the Commission, these directions are best defined by the democratic tradition: a basic respect for the person and his potentialities, a mutually responsible relationship between the individual and the group, and reliance upon the free play of intelligence rather than authority, tradition, blind impulse, or force in the resolution of conflict and the formulation of plans of action. Educational activities must further the learner's ability to achieve these values both in all aspects of his own life

[1] For a fuller statement of the Commission's fundamental position, see V. T. Thayer, Caroline B. Zachry, and Ruth Kotinsky, for the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum (Progressive Education Association), *Reorganizing Secondary Education* (New York, D. Appleton–Century Co., 1939).

and, concomitantly, in all aspects of the society in which he participates.

In order to obtain first-hand evidence upon the basis of which this point of view might be made effective in secondary education, the Commission established, first, a Study of Adolescents to gain increased understanding of the problems, interests, and concerns of young people. Second, it established a series of committees in each of a number of areas of instruction—English, art, science, mathematics, and social studies. Each of these committees assumed the responsibility of studying the contribution which its particular field might make to meeting the educational needs of adolescents in the democratic society of America today. In addition, each committee undertook to illustrate its conclusions by a series of suggestions to teachers. The personnel of these committees was made up of specialists in the fields under consideration, of secondary-school and college teachers, and of students of educational theory and practice. The staff of the Study of Adolescents contributed its knowledge of adolescent development to the deliberations of the committees, and students of society and culture were called upon from time to time for counsel.

This, then, is the setting of *Language in General Education,* the Report of the Language Section of the Committee on the Function of English in General Education.[2] The proposals of the report are in accord with the basic position of the Com-

[2] The Committee on the Function of English in General Education was originally established by the Commission to study and report upon all aspects of the teaching of English in secondary schools. *Teaching Creative Writing,* by Lawrence H. Conrad, was published in 1937 by D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., under the auspices of this Committee. *Reader's Guide to Prose Fiction: Bibliographies of 1500 Novels Selected, Classified, and Annotated for Use in Meeting the Needs of Students in Senior High School and Junior College,* by Elbert Lenrow, now in preparation, is also sponsored by this Committee. Because of the lack of time and the complexity of the studies undertaken, the original plan of the Committee to publish a report upon the teaching of literature was not pursued. Happily, however, this gap is filled by *Literature as Exploration,* by Louise M. Rosenblatt, published in 1938 by D. Appleton–Century Company, Inc., under the auspices of the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association.

mission as a whole. Increasing the adolescent's facility in relating himself accurately and meaningfully to his world through the skillful use of language is closely related to his prevailing interests and concerns, for language plays a large part in expressing the self, communicating with others, gaining control over experience, and these are prevailing urges of all human beings at all stages of development. Furthermore, increased facility in the understanding and use of language leads in the direction of realizing democratic values. The optimum development of personality is conditioned upon full and free communication with one's fellows. In a highly verbal society mutually responsible relationships between the individual and the group are defined and maintained largely through the spoken and written word. Perhaps most important, the free play of intelligence is to a great extent dependent upon the effective use of words in examining the past and portraying and exploring both present realities and the possible consequences of proposed lines of action.

Under contemporary social conditions widespread sensitivity to the reference and intent of language is particularly crucial. Many of the social, economic, and cultural factors which profoundly affect men's lives are highly abstract in nature. It is impossible to understand them or to cope with them effectively without a firm grasp upon verbal symbols and their ways. The verbiage of mass appeals may be misleading either by blunder or intent. The press, the moving-picture, and the radio make it difficult for the individual to discuss and dispute or to check the source of what others would have him believe. He must decide for himself whether facts are distorted, whether suggestions acted upon will bring about the foretold happy results, whether appeal is being made to his thought and judgment or to his irrational impulses alone. In making such decisions as these the intelligent understanding and analysis of language is indispensable. Upon the ability of the common man to discriminate between bombast and analysis, willful confusion and the determination to bring intelligence to bear, the future of democracy may well depend.

In studying the function of language instruction in general education and in formulating the proposals and suggestions of this report, the Committee has profited by the generous help of many persons. This fact makes it difficult, if not indeed impossible, adequately to acknowledge the contributions of each.

The debt of this Committee to I. A. Richards, however, is far more general than it has been possible to acknowledge through scattered specific references to his works. It is not the desire of the Committee to commit Mr. Richards to agreement with this report in all its details, or even with the point of view it represents, but simply to acknowledge with gratitude the many ways in which he has furthered this study. Not only have the members of the Committee been influenced by the thinking of Mr. Richards, but they have also freely availed themselves in many ways of the help which he has so generously given in putting at their disposal studies and reports as yet unpublished, and in criticizing and making constructive suggestions for the report through personal attendance at several meetings of the Committee and through correspondence.

The Committee is also deeply indebted to those whose active coöperation in preparation of earlier forms of the report has been invaluable, particularly to Theodora Abel, of the Manhattan Trade School for Girls; Lawrence H. Conrad, of the New Jersey State Teachers College at Montclair; Robert J. Havighurst and John Marshall, of the General Education Board; Mary Marshall, formerly of the Horace Mann School for Girls; Louise M. Rosenblatt, of Brooklyn College; Herbert W. Smith, of the Francis W. Parker School; Eunice Vassar, of the Study of Adolescents; and to the many members of other committees of the Commission who have rendered especially important service in pointing out the ways in which language teaching enters into all subject fields.

Many others have greatly helped the Committee by making constructive criticisms and sending pertinent materials. Special acknowledgment for such help is due Ralph P. Boas, of Wheaton College; Fletcher Collins, Jr., of Elon College; M. Kendig, of the Institute of General Semantics, Chicago; Nich-

olas Moseley, of the General Education Board; James B. Munn, of Harvard University; John G. Pilley and Alfred D. Sheffield, of Wellesley College; and Laurence Stapleton, of Bryn Mawr College. In addition, many valuable suggestions have come from the members of the Summer Workshops of the Progressive Education Association, where tentative forms of the report were used in the summers of 1937, 1938, and 1939.

The Committee is especially indebted to Henry H. Richards of Groton School, Mr. Munn, and Mr. Sheffield for their assistance in reading proof.

In making these acknowledgments, the Committee in no way wishes to imply that those who have so generously given their assistance are in total agreement with the Report as a whole, or with all its details. Responsibility for errors of fact or of judgment lies entirely with the Committee. Indeed, some of those mentioned have rendered the greatest possible service by participating in discussions which clarified issues upon which perfect agreement cannot perhaps be reached.

In fact, it is not the intent of the Committee to set up one theory of language as the last and final word on a subject so intricate and controversial. We believe simply that the theories we advance lead in the direction of encouraging that close attention to meanings which constitutes an essential aspect of any genuine educational process. At the same time, we realize that language is ill-adapted for talk about itself. All talk about language is necessarily highly metaphorical, and, in the sense in which we later use the word, highly burdened with abstractions.

It is our hope that this report will be read in accordance with the techniques of reading which it advocates—that the reader will submit not only his own words to the test of analysis, but ours as well. Thinking about language is a fascinating occupation for anybody and an essential one for the teacher. If this report succeeds in stimulating such thought, it will have served one of its major purposes. Whether or not such thinking leads precisely to the conclusions set forth here is of minor importance. Perhaps, if enough thinking goes on among enough

teachers for a long enough time, a generally accepted theory will eventually emerge. The Committee, however, makes no claim for this report beyond that of suggesting one line of thought that may perhaps help to bring about that happy result.

This report is therefore offered to all secondary-school teachers, as well as to teachers of English alone, in the hope that it may prove of service in clarifying the appropriate function of language and its study in the education of adolescents in America today.

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CONTENTS

LANGUAGE
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I

AN APPROACH TO LANGUAGE
IN GENERAL EDUCATION

OUR BELIEF is that the teaching of English, if it is to be effective, must be approached in terms of a perspective which extends beyond the classroom. Our hope is that many of our readers will become collaborators in the development and application of the kind of approach to teaching implied by the theories here discussed. Those theories center around a concept of language as an indispensable, potent, but highly fluid set of symbols by which human beings mentally put their feelings and experiences in order, get and keep in touch with other human beings, and build up new and clearer understanding of the world around them. Language is the instrument above all others by which most persons are enabled at once to develop and participate in their own culture. When we talk about its function in general education, we are talking about something so embedded in human living that no discussion of it can be more than fragmentary or less than difficult.

Language itself is a symbol which stirs up an enormous variety of possible references. In its widest meaning the word may refer to all the systems of symbols by which any members of the animal kingdom have communicated since the beginning of time. To most of us *language* means the system of symbols used by men. But even when we narrow our use of the word to this, we may mean one or another or several things, and in studying language we may have

any one of these things in mind. To many teachers it means simply French or German or Italian—"foreign languages." To many others it means conjugating a system of grammatical forms, parsing, or diagramming. To others it means a study of the sounds of languages; or of the history of the changes in the form and sense of words over a period of years; or of the borrowings and lendings, the complex relations between one language and another. To others, "the study of language," when discussed in connection with English teaching, will mean "vocabulary building" or fluency in the social uses of language, whether telephoning or writing letters, reading books or telling stories.

For the purposes of this report, *language* may be taken to mean all these and more, limited not by "fields of study" but by an emphasis on language as a going concern, a living symbol-system of the most vital importance to our society and to our individual lives. It is important, both in formal education, and also in continued self-education out of school, because so much information, so much suggestion, so many quick intuitions come to us largely through a verbal medium. It is still more important because without words we could not classify what we learn, or put it into a framework in which we can keep clear the relation of one idea, one bit of information, one set of facts, one set of feelings, to another. An intelligent and integrated person might be described as one who is capable of sorting out his experiences, making pertinent distinctions among them, and seeing them in relation to his system of values. He is capable of making comparisons between two sets of data, two experiences, two generalized ideas, without confusion between them. He cannot do any of these things at all unless he can attach verbal symbols to them for purposes of labelling, keep those symbols distinct, and manipulate them without confusion. And he can do them better if he

is aware of the very tangled knots of thought and feeling to which any symbol in men's ordinary language may refer, of the way in which any word may take on life of its own and get out of hand, bringing up innumerable, irrelevant feelings and associations, sidetracking his thinking along some one strand of its possible total meaning not relevant to the purposes at hand, and landing him in a quagmire.

The business of a first chapter—and probably a whole book is not more than a first chapter to such a subject—is to box the compass and set the course. Language is a necessary part of all individual development. It is also the collective communication system of any human group, the vehicle of its culture. And it operates in both cases as a system of intricately interlocking symbols.

LANGUAGE AS INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

Like any cultural activity, language may be considered as a personal way of behaving. This aspect is of special significance for the teacher, for what he deals with directly is neither a system nor a culture, but individual students who are concerned with developing their ability to speak and write and read. We may better understand the rôle of language in human experience if we consider first some of the steps by which any individual learns to use language.

The physiological reactions which result in an infant's first use of his vocal chords are parts of his bodily movements, which include kicking, clutching, variations in breathing, and facial contortions. The earliest sound, the birth cry, is essential to life itself. Crying occurs after that as a response to various internal and external stimuli, some of which may be decidedly unpleasant, others less so, or perhaps even pleasant. When the child discovers, however vaguely, that desirable results (food, handling, presence of

an adult, light, warmth, or a combination of these) may be secured by crying, and cries to gain his end, we may consider that he is using language.

The simple *ah, ah, ah* sound, which is little more than breathing, and early consonant sounds (*p, b, m, n*) produced by suckling, combine into a varied series of syllables. Frequently they are accompanied by or result from gross bodily exercise. Adults accept some of these combinations as words, and the child learns to associate them with approval and other pleasing results. It is possible, at least, that the early *mama* and *dada* mean to him, not particular persons, but situations in which the mother and father play a part, or in which the parents and associated experiences of food, warmth, being held, and so forth, have an added element, the words *mama* and *dada*.

It is extremely important that teachers recognize the meaning of these early language steps, for they are illustrative of later experiences that are more difficult to note. Language is seen in the infant as one factor in a total reaction to a large experience, and a word as an increasingly sharpened symbol.[1] Thus *mama* eventually comes to mean a particular person in the room, then that particular person in any room. The older child's difficulty in giving definitions for words he yet uses competently, or his paralysis when asked to stand still, stop using his hands, and repeat what he has said before, are familiar illustrations of his difficulty in separating the symbol from the situation of which it is a part. This difficulty follows a great many people into adult life, and becomes one of the sources of confusion that teaching based on an adequate theory of meaning ought to be able to minimize. Learning to separate the symbol from the situation symbolized is one of

[1] See pages 19 ff. on "Language as a Symbolic System" for further discussion of the ways in which words may be said to be symbols.

the most important steps in the difficult process of learning to handle words as tools of thinking. A pupil may tend to be frustrated and to say, "There *is* no other way of saying it" —that is, to be unable to talk about a certain situation in any other symbols than those that were originally associated with it. This automatic identification of the symbol and the situation of which it is a part often becomes a serious intellectual and emotional limitation. One of the teacher's functions in helping a child with his use of language will be, not to try to break the association, which is an important link, but to sharpen it at one point and stretch it at another, so that the child sees that a symbol may be his servant and not his master, that it is only one of a number of possible tags, and that "what it means" is only one of a number of possible meanings. This becomes a step in the process of seeing how individual a thing a word as a symbol often is and how, if human communication is not to be a game of blindman's buff, each individual must stretch his own idea of a symbol's "meaning" to allow for, and discriminate among, the sorts of experiences which another individual may attach to the same symbol.

The diffuse beginnings of language should not be accepted as mere steps, later outgrown, in the acquisition of spoken language. Words whose origins lie in broad, diffused experiences, highly affective in nature, may later come to hold (as their base) a sharpened specific meaning (as in the phrase, "*George Washington's mother*") or a generalized, impersonal meaning (as in, "A *mother* tends to be defensive of her offspring"); but these words frequently continue to evoke the emotional reactions of the first association.

Some psychologists have said that when a child realizes that objects have names already developed, the first significant step in language growth has been made. Such a realiza-

tion often results in a stream of questions: *What is this, and this?* Nothing more than the name or the activity of saying the name may, for the time being, be desired. Young children are frequently observed saying over to themselves words that apparently have no sense meaning for them. They enjoy their skill in making them, or the sound of the syllables. That tendency of an adult to pronounce a word which he sees and understands, or the delight in pronouncing tongue-twisters, or even some part of the adult's enjoyment of poetry, may be related to this childhood experience.

An extension of the understanding that there are names for objects and relationships occurs when the child discovers that the community has words that his family does not use; and again when he discovers the existence of dialects differing from his own, or of foreign languages. (That some adults never see the significance of these facts is suggested by amusement at localisms, and the frequently heard description of foreign speech as "funny." Thus foreigners "jabber away in their strange tongues, while we speak a respectable language.") A still further extension occurs when the child realizes that others use the same words he uses, but in different senses.[1]

The infant's first utterances are single words rather than what the adult knows as a sentence. Some students have attempted to classify the first words under the categories of adult speech, nouns, verbs, or adjectives. The meaning is, however, more complex than such a classification would imply. *Ball* may mean "I have a ball," "This is my ball," "Give me my ball," "Take my ball," and so forth. The

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[1] If his symbols are still tied exclusively to the situations which they originally symbolized for him, he will tend either not to make this further step at all, or to call other different uses of the word "wrong." If this further step is made, he will recognize different usages as legitimate and expected, and be on the alert to distinguish them.

single word suffices because hearer, ball, and setting are often a part of the sentence. The single word is in reality a condensed statement. Thus *ball*, repeated vigorously, means one thing if the child has the ball in his hands, and another if it has fallen onto the floor. Later the youngster learns to clarify or express for himself more and more of the relations or characteristics of the ball and associated objects or persons. He says, "My ball," "Pretty ball," "I (*or* me) want ball," "Give me ball," "Ball gone." As adults we often assume that the most important relations can be entirely expressed in words; however, we imply the contrary when we say, as we frequently must: "I must know the circumstances under which that was said."

The intimate relation of language to other forms of behavior is seen through studies of speech growth. From almost no words at age one year, the average child's vocabulary increases so rapidly that by age six he uses two or three thousand. These he combines into all the basic structures—simple, compound, and complex sentences, with subjects, objects, prepositions, and verbs conventionally related. Examination of the relative frequency of these structures, however, suggests the close relation between structure and non-verbal experience. Thus the simple clause precedes the compound sentence, the complex appearing last. There is a gradual increase, continuing at least through adolescence, in the relative number of dependent clauses used. The fairly obvious inference is that causal clauses, for example, are used with relative infrequency by the younger child because he does not as yet see causal relations.

This very brief discussion of language growth in the individual illustrates the concept of speech development as one set of responses within the total pattern of responses. The child's first attempt at language, when he cried to

secure attention, was a part of a larger bodily response. So, later in life, although by degrees he has attached more specific meanings to refined symbols, he still associates the use of these symbols with larger responses. Some of these we see in posture, gesture, or facial expression. Emotional and other values must vary to at least a degree from individual to individual. To one infant *mama* means a mother who lifts and caresses, and to another a mother who punishes. *Engine* is a specific kind of machine to the child who has seen only one locomotive. The term has larger content to a civil engineer. High-school students are frequently surprised to find that Caesar's hurling machines were *engines*. Nor will a given individual hold a fixed meaning for a given word. Every symbol has associations from scores of situations, where emotional responses have varied along with uses of the word itself. Which of these associations is to be evoked in a given instance probably depends not only upon the immediate situation but upon the relation of its elements to those in previous situations with which a word has been combined.

LANGUAGE AS CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Language is a part of every individual's development, but what language he uses depends on the group into which he is born. Therefore language may also be considered as a cultural institution developed by a tribe, race, or civilization. Every human group of which we know has a language; and as far back as we can reach in history, whether by examining the written records or by reconstructing earlier forms on the basis of these records, language as we know it today has always been a cultural possession of man. It is impossible to think of man at any time or place as conducting his life in isolation. It is equally inconceivable that he

could live in a society with other human beings without the medium of language.

From any sober consideration of languages as they present themselves in time and place, we are led to a humble conviction that the use of language is as old as the human race itself, and as universal as man's quest for food, shelter, and a way of life. *Our own language or dialect possesses no intrinsic superiority.* It is merely the particular symbolic system that has developed in our culture and that provides us as individuals with a means of personal growth through participation in the life about us. In using language we are doing what human beings do everywhere and have always done; from the ancient Tibetan telling his friends about the foreigners who had just arrived from the west, to the modern American gossiping about his acquaintances over a game of bridge; from the Navajo priest instructing the novice in the mysteries of the Night Chant, to the teacher of English discussing *Macbeth* with his student. Language is not the exclusive property of an advanced race of human beings, or of the inhabitants of a highly civilized culture, or of a superior group of people within a culture.

The school can be a place where the student's use of language is given the respect due to any activity that is so deeply rooted in human needs. It can be a place where language is regarded, not as an externally imposed discipline, but as a potential means of self-discipline and self-realization. Unless the student has met with hostile criticism of his efforts and with pat answers to his questions, the language that he speaks cannot fail to have a compelling interest for him. It is inextricably woven into the intimate concerns of his daily living. It has been his constant companion throughout the most important years of his growth, even before he entered school. From early childhood, as we have seen, he has asked questions about language.

"How did this thing get its name?" "Why does such a word mean such a thing?" "Why do we have two words for the same thing?" These are questions that, from an adult point of view, seem to begin on an extremely naïve level. But they are questions that can lead the student to a progressive discovery of the patterns in his language, to an increasingly critical interpretation of the meanings in speech and in writing, to a widening participation in the cultural life about him, and to a deepening perception of his personal relationship to other people. In pursuing these inquiries, no individual can be expected to reach any final goal of perfection. The teacher must be honest and bold enough to admit that he himself has no final answers. Grammarians and linguists have still far to go in explaining the patterns of the English language; professional writers and critics are still interpreting and reinterpreting the heritage of English literature. If words are symbols of our thoughts and feelings about things, many problems of language—even though language is an organized system—can hardly be more susceptible of "absolute solutions" than are the problems of our own cultural and personal life, which our language mirrors. All that we can do, whether we are specialists or teachers or students, is to bring our past experience and our present understanding to bear upon the search for tentative answers to questions about what language is and what it does.

Perhaps the primary task of the English teacher will always be to encourage skill in verbal expression and discrimination in the interpretation of language. But there is a grave danger in dealing with language as a closed, self-contained system, in which words refer to other words, and so on *ad infinitum*. Language labels and interprets phenomena and ideas. It must have reference to things outside language, and its use must be geared to a changing cultural

and personal world. Verbal skill and discrimination are
valuable for the student only in so far as they serve to order
his diffuse and expanding experiences and to bring
fresh insight into his world. Orderly clarification through
words is no more than a process of stock-taking, sorting,
classifying, and combining. This is a process that must be
continually carried on, for it is only human experience that
gives words meaning; and once words have lost their touch
with human experience they are no longer symbols of any-
thing, but merely sounds.

One of the most elaborately precise uses of language in
our culture is to be found in traditional legal practice,
which is able to preserve its verbal clarity only at the ex-
pense of ignoring the flexible and changing character of
human life. Legal concepts are rigidly defined by precedent
and applied to certain "facts" that are arbitrarily selected
from the human situations brought to court. The defini-
tions are assumed to be absolute and uniformly applicable
to all cases. Perhaps our legal system, if it is to preserve its
administrative efficiency, must be satisfied with the ficti-
tious clarity achieved by schematizing human events and
dealing with them in terms of verbal conventions. If so,
there is some danger that this administrative efficiency is
being preserved at the cost of twisting modern facts to fit
archaic verbalisms; and, as pointed out by Bentham [1] a
hundred years ago, there is perhaps a particular need here
for the kind of reëxamination of language advocated in
this report.[2]

[1] See C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (New York, Harcourt,
Brace and Co., 1932).

[2] A beginning has been made in this country toward the reinterpretation
of legal terminology through analysis of facts and situations as they ac-
tually exist. Perhaps the chief exponents of this newer philosophy of legal
interpretation were the late Justice Holmes and the late Justice Cardozo.
See also Roscoe Pound, in "Mechanical Jurisprudence," *Columbia Law Re-
view*, Vol. 8, December, 1908, pp. 605, 608, 610. Although legal writers and

The same verbal procedure is used when dictionary definitions are applied to words in a sentence, and the procedure has also been attempted by many schools of literary criticism. If we could once define the basic literary standards, we should then be able to interpret any piece of literature with clear-cut logic merely by applying the fixed definitions. And we could pass these definitions on to our students, so that they might distinguish and recognize the true literary values in any literary product. Unfortunately, however, literary values change with individual circumstance, and with time and place: an Elizabethan English audience came to see *Hamlet* with expectations and interests different from those of an eighteenth-century English audience, and Shakespeare would scarcely recognize his play as it is sometimes interpreted in the modern theater. The very terms in which literary values are defined also undergo changes of meaning from one period to another. Such an inflexible use of language as that exemplified by much present-day legal and critical terminology has no place in education. When verbal bonds are attached to the ever-shifting realities of the student's experience as a means of permanently holding them in place, language becomes a restraint upon his understanding. Such bonds may become attached if the student does not learn to separate symbol from thing symbolized, and they may similarly be fostered by a misuse of the dictionary.

In our highly verbal culture students learn very quickly to be dexterous with words and to dispose of complex situations by means of some accepted verbal formula. Glibness is particularly noticeable in the speech of secondary school

the best judges are fully alive to these considerations, it is still true that the law generally mistakes words for things. This subject is referred to below under "Abstractions," and some extracts from Justice Cardozo's decisions are given on pages 120 ff.

students. Among themselves adolescents often develop a special idiom, consisting largely of stereotyped "wise-cracks," slogans, and stock phrases. This peculiar speech undoubtedly provides them with different kinds of satisfaction: it is a sign of membership in the group; it gives a pleasant illusion of cleverness and sophistication; it gives a fresh sense of novelty, for the "slang" changes constantly; and, most important, it offers them an opportunity to say just the right thing without spending the time and the creative effort that would be required to examine whatever they are talking about. In the everyday conduct of our affairs language often fulfils such an economizing function. There are many circumstances in which specific verbal conventions, such as greetings or expressions of regret, are great conveniences that we can use to label a situation and put it quickly out of sight. The adolescent merely amplifies this function in the conventionalized idiom that he employs with his fellow-students. Like any conventionalized use of language, its only danger is that it may continue to supply the student with a smug feeling of final and permanent achievement. Whether verbal conventions are based on cold legal analysis, or on the fixed literary procedures that have formed so large a part of English teaching, or on the more informal customs of the secondary school student's speech, they make of language a sterile means for pigeon-holing situations and problems instead of a means for bringing insight and a sense of order to bear upon them.

If the teacher of English is to deal not only with problems within language, but with the living realities that give language its authority, he cannot afford to be solicitous about the dividing lines between one subject-matter field and another. His task is to encourage the kind of skill and discrimination with words that develops hand in hand with the student's understanding of the situations that he and

other people are talking about; and this involves dealing with language in fields outside of literature. If the student is to develop an ability to handle language problems realistically, the study of language in literature should form a part—but only a part—of a wider program.

The use of language in the physical and biological sciences, for example, has a place in a balanced consideration of language. The teacher of English need not be an expert in the scientific fields. The details of content in these fields are the province of the science teacher, who must be responsible for the special contribution that his materials can make to the student's growing intelligence and insight; but the teacher of English can deal with the problems raised by language in the treatment of scientific materials. Problems of definition and problems of verification loom large in scientific discourse. Terms must be defined with precision, and must have specific reference to tangible operations that can be observed. The definition of terms, the documentation of evidence, the statement of conditions under which the terms (as defined) can be applied and validated, the description of relations that can be observed in external operations—these are the processes demanded of language in science. The same processes, as a matter of fact, must be employed in exploring the patterns of language itself. Linguistic operations, like those of the physical universe, are amenable to description in definable terms. A language system is a field open to the student's inquiry, and one which can challenge all his powers of critical and scientifically controlled reasoning.

But scientific discourse, with its sharply defined and explicit communication, does not exhaust the functions of language; it merely exemplifies the realistic accuracy with which language can be used when the field of reference is carefully restricted. In mathematics the scientist has a more

accurate symbolic instrument for his purposes. Unlike mathematical symbols, the symbols of language are slippery things. They do not stay put: they carry multiple meanings, which shift from time to time and differ from place to place; their ostensible references are overlaid with meanings of a non-rational character. Language has undergone its organic changes in the world of human activities, of which scientific reasoning is merely one aspect. It is the result of man's collective quest for expression, and it therefore reflects the cultural values, the changing attitudes and intentions and preoccupations by which man lives.

It is in this human environment that the student must find his place and his direction, and the language of his culture is his most potent means of participating in the world about him and of sharing the common life of his fellow men. From early childhood he begins this process of sharing within the small family circle. Playmates coming from other families widen the range of his participation through language. When he attends school, he comes into contact with a larger and more varied group of children, whose attitudes differ from his own at many points. Some of these differences can be examined in classroom discussions; others are taken up in the student's more intimate friendship groups. Finally, through written language, he is introduced to more remote persons, places, and times. Thus he gradually extends his cultural horizon.

Participation is, of course, more than a simple matter of conforming to what other people are supposed to be doing. The student's cultural development has its personal aspect. In learning to square his behavior with that of the people about him, the student is going through a process of self-realization. He does not simply take over cultural forms wholesale; he gradually weaves these forms into the texture of his personality, and it is in terms of his personality that

these forms take on meaning for him. From this point of view, the English language is more than an impersonal cultural system, existing "out there," to which the student must eventually conform. The English of a particular individual, like his style of dress or his eating habits, will resemble the English of those about him by virtue of the fact that he creates this mode of behavior by interacting with those about him. Our ability to abstract a supposedly uniform "English language" from the much less uniform actualities of individual speech and writing should not blind us to the highly personal nature of language. To the individual, his language, first and always, is an intimate part of himself.

.There is special need for emphasizing the fact that language is a medium of personal growth and self-realization. Our culture today is marked by an unprecedented vastness and lack of integration. It is broad, not deep. The machine age has made us move too fast, and too close to the surface, to permit us even an illusion of depth. We leap from one novelty to another. While its area is being extended over the world, our culture is borrowing elements from widely disparate regions, without grafting them to any guiding pattern. It is changing at such a rapidly increasing rate that elements from a remote yesterday are jostling the emerging elements of an anticipated tomorrow. In a cultural environment as varied as ours, the individual has opportunities for a rich and widely participating life, but he is also in danger of becoming disorganized and confused. Out of a mass of conflicting values, of antagonistic notions and practices, the individual must try to find a coherent pattern for his personal development. A teacher sensitive to the vital rôle that language plays in clarifying and deepening the student's perception of himself can guide him in this process of achieving an integrated pattern of growth.

LANGUAGE AS A SYMBOLIC SYSTEM

Both the individual and cultural senses of "language" contain the idea that all language, viewed from whatever angle, is at base a system of symbols. It seems most profitable, in working toward a theory of language, to begin from this base, and in teaching to refer back to it. A concept of language as a system of interlocking symbols, to be interpreted in a context, underlies the rest of this report.

Words can be conveniently regarded as signs, in much the same sense that the ringing of the bell was a sign of food to Pavlov's [1] famous dog. Pavlov found that if the sequence of a ringing bell followed by the appearance of food was presented often enough, without too many false alarms, the bell would become a sign for the dog to expect food. His experiments showed that the dog could be conditioned to respond to signs. Pavlov's work has a significant bearing on the understanding of language, for there are many significant similarities—as well as significant differences—between his experimental signs and the symbols of language.

First of all, the relationship between the ringing of the bell and the appearance of food is a purely arbitrary one. The dog can be taught to respond in an identical way to any other signal—a buzzer or a flash of light. Or, under the proper experimental conditions, the dog can equally well be made to associate the sound of ringing with the arrival of a swarm of bumblebees. Words in themselves no more have an inherent, inevitable connection with the things for which they stand than has the bell with food.

After many experiences with such objects as houses, the child learns to relate the word *house* to the object with

[1] Y. P. Frolov, *Pavlov and his School: The Theory of Conditioned Reflexes* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 49–54.

such speed and inevitability that he tends to accept the word as being in some mysterious way the object itself or an essential part of it. This magical attitude toward words is not confined to children and to such unsophisticated persons as von Humboldt's peasant, who was profoundly impressed by the ability of astronomers to discover the properties of stars but was unable to fathom how they ever discovered the names of such remote heavenly bodies. Even as adults we must behave in certain situations as if words were the concrete objects for which they stand rather than mere symbols. There are taboo words, which must be treated as unclean things. There are religious words, some of which are holy things that must not be taken in vain. In our legal thinking, too, names of persons or organizations are regarded as inherent and tangible possessions; names can be bought and sold like articles of clothing, and an individual can be prosecuted for stealing names as well as food or money belonging to other people.

Such magical practices with verbal symbols are part of our cultural heritage, and they have their own historical rationale. With these practices all about us, it is difficult to escape the erroneous assumption that words are things and have an independent life of their own. We must be on our guard against these pervasive notions if we are to avoid the fallacy of concluding that students, in being confronted with words, are coming into contact with directly apprehended things, that they are learning to deal with objects in experience, when they are only learning to manipulate the verbal symbols of these objects.

The relation between the sign and the thing for which it stands is even more remote than has been implied so far. Pavlov's experiments give us a clue to this relation. After the dog has been conditioned, the bell is rung, and the dog salivates. There is no direct connection here between the

bell and the food itself; whether or not the food appears depends entirely upon the experimenter. The only connection established by Pavlov is an association between the signal and the dog's expectation of food. This is an association between the sign and a phase of the dog's psychological activity. In the same way the symbols of language have no direct connection with tangible objects in the physical world. Words have reference to our ideas, our psychological operations, about the world in which we live. They are part of our symbolic machinery for manipulating the thoughts and feelings which arise from the world of sense perception but which are not themselves perceptible.

A good deal of our verbal misunderstanding arises from the fallacy of assuming that words, if they are not things themselves, at least refer to identifiable things that should be self-evident to everyone. Our childhood experience in learning language and even our adult habits of talking can lead us to put too literal an interpretation upon the common phrase, "Do you *see* what I mean?" The first symbols that a child learns to isolate and to use successfully for communication are those referring to his experience with concrete things, with objects such as persons and blocks and balls and houses which he perceives directly through his senses. But most words do not refer to concepts about such clear-cut objects. Learning this may involve some painful surprises, as it did for the three-year-old whose mother had rapturously promised to give him a "vacation"; when he was merely taken away from home and was not, as far as he could see, given the promised gift, he broke into tears of disappointment.

Our adult confusions with verbal symbols may not be as crude and naïve as this, but unless we are aware of hidden metaphors our linguistic habits may encourage similar difficulties. We speak of "giving someone a right" and "tak-

ing an attitude" in the same way that we speak of "giving someone a pencil" and "taking a sheet of paper." We can talk about "one crisis, two crises, several crises in a year," and similarly about "one house, two houses, several houses in a block." As far as their verbal treatment is concerned, vacations and crises seem to behave like houses and pencils and sheets of paper. There is, then, a certain logic to the misunderstanding of the three-year-old boy who expected to receive a substantial gift when he was told that he would be given a vacation. Even in our sophisticated linguistic terminology, vacations and houses are classed together as substantives.

The great power—and the danger—of language lies in the privilege it gives us to manipulate abstract notions as if they were tangible things. Some of these notions, such as our concept of *house*, are relatively easy to locate in our common experience. For the practical purposes of communication, we seldom need bother to examine the meaning of such words. Unfortunately, very few of the words that we use have even this spurious concreteness. The content of *vacation*, or such more diffuse abstractions as *fascism* and *communism* and *democracy*, cannot be referred to any simple location in space. In these more obviously abstract references, we come face to face with the fact that words, like Pavlov's bell, have reference to our psychological processes, our expectancies in the realm of thinking and feeling. At bottom, our concept of *house* is hardly more concrete, though somewhat easier to handle, than our concept of *democracy*, and neither one of these concepts can be fully explained or positively defined merely by pointing to self-evident houses or democracies.

Though verbal symbols do not correspond in any absolute sense with the scheme of the concrete physical world, they do offer us a means of ticketing off ideas, which are

directly or ultimately based upon our experience in the physical world. Students can be led to an understanding of language, therefore, through examining the ideas to which words refer. But this does not mean that the interpretation of language is essentially a subjective or a purely verbal procedure. As a matter of fact, our ideas can be communicated verbally only to the extent that they are the common property of other people in our culture. A great part of cultural interaction consists in the comparison of ideas through words. The classroom is an excellent cultural laboratory in which each student has the opportunity of examining his own reaction to words by comparing his ideas with those of his fellow-students and teachers. The process of examining and validating his reactions may also be furthered by leading him back to an analysis of his experiences with the physical world which give his symbols their validity and meaning. The things and events and relations that he has experienced in the physical world are the source of his ideas expressed in language. It is to these complex experiences—some of them highly personal, others a part of our common culture—that the student must go for any final test of his understanding of words.

The parallel of Pavlov's experiments helps to clarify certain fundamental features of the sign situation basic in language. But there are clearly some essential differences between a sign situation that is deliberately oversimplified for experimental purposes and the highly complex symbol situation in language, differences that are of critical importance to any theory of language used for teaching.

An experiment such as Pavlov's is a frankly artificial and rigidly controlled attempt to find specific clues about specific processes in behavior that have been isolated for study. It does not pretend to be an observation of the normal developing life of the dog-subject. Nor can it afford to take

account of any differences in previous development among the subjects, unless these differences promise to have a gross effect upon the results of the experiment. The good experimenter has means at his disposal for minimizing or controlling or eliminating such interferences. For the strict purposes of his experiment, however, the dog-subjects are assumed to have no developmental history.

In addition, the respective rôles of the experimenter and his subject are clearly defined in the experimental situation. The experimenter operates the bell, and the dog does the responding; there is no reciprocal relation between the two. But in the cultural situation that governs language, the individual participates as both producer and receiver of symbols. Even when listening or reading, he is responding to language symbols as one who has previously had a hand in producing them. Furthermore, language symbols are not, like Pavlov's signs, the artificial products of an external agent who has deliberately selected the signs and defined the expected response. They are the products of a cumulative historical process of which the individual himself is a part. The language-using student, then, cannot be regarded as a mere receiver of words, one whose response is to be properly conditioned through the authority vested in some outside agent. He is a cultural participant in the give-and-take situations that involve language and in the slow cumulative drift that changes the very form and meaning of language symbols.

Furthermore language is a much more intricately patterned system of interrelated symbols than a sequence of separate and controlled signs in a laboratory can be; symbols in language are much more like the cells in the human body. The patterns may be seen at several levels. First, in the familiar contextual sequence of words that we meet in discourse, the words in any sentence or group of sentences

are inextricably related to one another in meaning, and are interpreted together as a whole, the sense of each varying according to its neighbors. Then, far more complex, there is the larger "psychological" contextual pattern, when "context" refers to the whole network of relevant and irrelevant responses from past experience which any given word symbol, or set of word symbols, may arouse.[1] Then behind these contexts there is the organized framework of the language, what we call its structure (or, in the widest linguistic sense, its "grammar"). This is a complex but orderly configurated plan around which our living use of language plays endless variations.

The Pavlov type of experiment can illustrate the importance of context in the above two senses, in relation to sign-interpretation, but it can offer no parallel to this configurated system within which language symbols work, and by virtue of which they are capable of elasticity as no sets of separate structurally unconnected symbols could be, no matter how rich their contextual patterns. This organized framework therefore is a basic ingredient of the total verbal context of a linguistic symbol.

We should be ignoring this configurative nature of language if we consider the word *house,* for example, only in its character as a symbol of our idea of a certain sort of object. This symbol is at the same time a member of several groups of words, which membership gives it much flexibility of behavior. It belongs to an exclusive group of words which can express distinctions of singularity and plurality; *vacation* and even *essence* belong to this group, but *of* and *large* do not. It also belongs to another group of symbols which can refer to an act, *to house,* as well as to a thing, *a house;* and to another set which can qualify succeeding symbols in certain ways, *house-boat, house-top.*

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[1] Cf. Chapter IV, "The Basis of Language Teaching in English."

For the sake of convenience we have been referring to words as if they were somehow complete units in themselves. In a laboratory experiment, the signs may be that, but in language the word-signs almost invariably appear in combination. The individual growing into a use of it learns the typical configurations of his own language by dealing with words always in spoken or written contexts. If they were separate units, if there were no patterns of word-order, no basic grouping of sorts of words, their meaning would be simply the sum of their separate meanings. In that case, *house-boat* and *boat-house* would add up to the same thing. This would not only limit and cripple the expressive power of language, it would also rob it of the framework which governs its growth. The emergence of new symbolic forms and functions, new words and combinations, as outgrowths of an existing pattern, is a necessary process in language, whether the changes are of the impersonal, historical sort or the rapid visible changes within a lifetime. New words do not come into English capriciously. They always reaffirm old configurations. Clearly such words as *imagist* and *criticism* could not have been created unless a group of *-ist* and *-ism* words already existed in English.

Perhaps the close interrelations of words have been obscured by the fact that in writing, we use single blank spaces to separate words. Though there are many historical and practical reasons for this innocent convention, it probably has contributed to the illusion that words are self-contained, independent units. The fact that we write *nevertheless* as one word but *none the less* as three should be a warning. Our habits of writing do not convey, even crudely, the kind or degree of relationship between a meaningful symbol and its verbal environment. It is salutary for any one of us, prone as we are to regard English orthography

as the ultimately logical system conferring separate existence on English words, and somehow exhibiting a necessary connection between words and the universe, to stop every now and then and look at a line of cuneiform, or a page of modern Chinese.

Our orthography would be hopelessly unwieldy and impracticable if it did not ignore the complex interrelations of symbols, within words and between words, as they occur in connected discourse. Some words are tightly fused symbolic clusters (*compelling, importation, nationalistically*). Others are relatively loose-jointed groups of symbols (*handful, overcoat, nevertheless*). Still others appear in such closely knit combinations (*make out, on the whole*) that no meanings can be assigned to their constituent symbols. Furthermore, the word-like look of a language symbol does not necessarily tell us anything about its content, for similar ideas can be expressed by elements that have quite different kinds of relationship to the symbols around them. The idea of plurality, for example, can be indicated by internal changes (*men, teeth*), by tightly fused sub-words (*-s, -es*), by loosely joined sub-words (*multi-*), by separate words (*many, numerous, several*), and by word groups (*more than one, a number of*).

The dictionary is another of our linguistic devices which, if misunderstood, can encourage the illusion that words are separate and independent units. The alphabetical listing of words in the dictionary does not immediately suggest that words are normally related in a verbal context. But the purpose of the dictionary can best be understood from the modern lexicographer's process of arriving at his definitions. He is confronted with the same type of difficult task as the biologist who wishes to study the functions of individual cells. Both of them focus their attention upon a selected element, but they must take this element as they find

it, in the environment of other cells or other words. This process of tentatively isolating an element for intensive study is a necessary procedure in any task of analysis.

From observing the behavior of *house* in a number of verbal contexts, the dictionary-maker focuses on the relatively stable and constant functions of the word. By his general definition of *house,* however, he does not assert that the word *has* or *should* have no unique or less stable meanings in each particular context. He cannot take account of the highly variable factors that enter into the total meaning of *house* in every context, factors that would include each writer's purpose and intent, his mood, his attitudes toward himself and the rôle he is playing, toward his readers, toward his subject-matter. If the lexicographer were to attempt such a complete formulation of the meanings of *house* in all of its contexts, his description of this one symbol would obviously fill several volumes; and he would be compelled to bring out a fresh edition every month, in order to cover the many new contexts in which *house* would acquire special new meanings. It is precisely these variable unique meanings that he must exclude from his definition of *house* if it is to have any general application to the relatively stable meanings of the word in its various contexts. He is not, however, by so doing giving "rules" for the use of the word.

The dictionary, then, clearly cannot perform the task of contextual interpretation for the student. It simply can help him to limit the field of the word's possible senses. Under the guidance of a teacher, the student must do for himself the work of interpreting words in their natural environment of other words. In this way he can be encouraged to acquaint himself with new symbols and to examine his old words in new contexts. The teacher who is aware of the patterned and dynamic character of language will re-

alize that the student, in his process of interpretation, is not merely adding new words to his vocabulary or new passages to his repertory of reading. By discovering the unique and multiple meanings that a word may have in specific passages, the student will be increasing his control over language. The symbols in his language, like the cells of a living organism, can grow by extending their functional range and by taking on sharper and more differentiated functions. If the interpretation of words in context has any value beyond itself, it should develop the student's language into a more flexible and discriminating symbolism for expressing his own thoughts and feelings and for understanding those of other people. And if this verbal process of expressing and understanding has any value beyond itself, it should develop the student's ability to discover these thoughts and feelings within his own experience, where in turn he will find the realistic basis for testing the validity of language symbols.

II

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF ENGLISH
AND OTHER SUBJECTS

IT HAS LONG BEEN an accepted doctrine in education that English is in some way dependent upon other subjects and related to them. This belief has generally been expressed in some such ways as these: "Every teacher is a teacher of English; English should be taught in every classroom." Or, conversely, "Every field of study offers material for the English teacher." This principle, thus stated, however, has implications and applications that have not been fully examined and realized. English teachers, as well as teachers of other subjects, have taken a narrow and not altogether clear view of what constitutes *English* in this context. In practice it has been confined to the mechanical side of oral and written expression. Hence the dictum that English should be taught in every classroom is taken to mean that all teachers should correct mistakes of pronunciation or grammar in recitations, and in written work should require a reasonably high standard in such things as spelling and punctuation.

English teachers themselves have made no wider claims, nor have they pushed much further the inquiry into the relationship between their subject and other subjects. The teaching of English in other classrooms upon this basis, if undertaken at all, becomes a vague sort of obligation assumed in an effort to "improve the student's English" and out of a desire to help the teacher of English. If the English

teacher himself has not fully realized that English and other subjects are interdependent, teachers in other fields can hardly be blamed if they have not seen how far English is basic for their subjects, and can scarcely be charged with negligence if they have recognized the claims of English in their classrooms reluctantly or not at all. As long as these claims are confined to the mechanics of writing and speaking, to the elimination of grammatical blunders, to what we may call mere correctness of verbalization, English cannot be shown to offer any *quid pro quo* to teachers in other fields. A science paper badly spelled and punctuated may be, to the science teacher, just as valid as the same paper correctly spelled and punctuated; and correction of spelling and punctuation mistakes on a history paper does not noticeably make for a more sound knowledge of history upon the part of the student.

Is there then, in fact, any interdependence between English and other subjects? Can English teachers so describe their subject that it will be seen to be a part of all subjects; to reach out into them in a giving as well as a taking capacity—not only taking sustenance and support from other subjects, but also giving them equally sustenance and support?

We believe that there are aspects of the study of English which thus closely concern teachers in other fields. They can best be brought together under the heading of *English as a Language,* or, more narrowly, *The Critical Approach to English Discourse.* It is precisely this branch of English studies, a branch that is basic for almost every other subject in the curriculum, which has suffered neglect or even misdirection at the hands of English teachers themselves. It is, moreover, a fundamental part of the study of English itself, since, as we shall show, it forms the basis upon which all the other aspects of English studies must themselves

rest; speaking, writing, reading, whatever parts of their subject are taught by English teachers, depend upon English, the language.

We believe that a study of the English language is at the foundation of general education because it is in the English language that teachers and students in English and all other subjects must, to a greater or lesser extent, express, read about, and think about their material. Language directly enters education as the medium in which inherited knowledge is preserved and made available and communicable; as the means of present communication (the expression of thought, whether written or spoken; and the understanding of the thought of others, through reading or listening); as one of the means, perhaps that most generally used, for crystallizing, organizing, and formulating new knowledge; as one of the methods, perhaps again the one most generally used, by which we manipulate our ideas in certain kinds of thinking.

Perhaps we can best illustrate this interdependence of English considered as language and other subjects by a brief examination of a common occupation which involves language, that is, reading. Let us turn to a well-known passage which will serve as an illustration of what is involved in written material that a student might be called upon to read.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . .

This is a passage which "belongs," perhaps, to history or social studies. It illustrates the language difficulties that a student in these classes might be called upon to master.

What equipment should a reader have to interpret this passage well? From what sources does this equipment come? We cannot attempt here fully to answer this question, nor to make a complete and final interpretation of the passage. No interpretation, in fact, is ever complete or final. Certainly this passage, of such vast importance to Americans, will never be completely expounded. What follows is only a small part of even a reasonably full exposition and expansion, given only as an example. We have attempted only to illustrate certain kinds of questions which a reader might legitimately ask himself about the passage.

A reader versed in mathematics, and used to applying its principles to forms of verbal discourse, might limit himself to an examination of how the document from which this passage is taken follows the Euclidean form of proof. It first states its axioms, then proceeds from them by a reasoned logical process of deduction to prove a certain proposition. The passage here quoted is simply the statement of the axioms from which the conclusion will be reasoned. "We hold these truths to be self-evident," the mathematician realizes, is logically equivalent to saying, "Here are the axioms. We accept them without argument or proof." As a mathematician he is not interested in the validity of the axioms; he accepts them as true, and turns rather to the validity of the steps that follow, to the form of proof. Does the conclusion, "These United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent states," follow as the logical conclusion from logical steps? Or must other assumptions and postulates, not axioms, not self-evident, perhaps not even stated, be invoked?

The reader versed in history, on the other hand, might attack this passage from a different point of view. His interest might center in tracing through the centuries the development of the ideas it contains, perhaps from the

legal maxim, *"omnes homines natura aequales sunt"* of the Antonine period, to George Mason's Virginia *Bill of Rights,* with its "All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, . . . namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety." [1] Since the legal and philosophical development of the concepts of the *Declaration of Independence* was well known to Jefferson, this analysis would lead to a better understanding of the mind of the man who framed the document, and hence would be an important part of the reconstruction of its setting in its own time. It might lead the historian on to a further study of its contemporary setting. What were the events which led to it? What was the temper of men's minds when it was written? What led Jefferson to disregard in his immediate source the "means of acquiring property" and "pursuing and obtaining safety" as "rights" of man? The historian would realize the special meaning put by Jefferson upon *free* and *equal,* learning from his other writings [2] that he recognized the existence of a "natural aristocracy," which he called "the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society," seeing that "it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society." Jefferson had faith that the American form of government would succeed in putting into offices of responsibility these

[1] Francis Newton Thorpe, editor, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1909), Vol. VII, "The Constitution of Virginia—1776," p. 3813.

[2] Paul Leicester Ford, editor, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892–1899), Vol. IX, "Letter to John Adams, Monticello, October 28, 1813," pp. 425, 428.

"natural aristocrats." Again, to Jefferson, the historian realizes, "freedom" was relative, not absolute. "Such men," he writes of Americans, who hold property and thus have an interest in "law and order," "may safely and advantageously reserve to themselves . . . a degree of freedom, which, in the hands of the canaille of the cities of Europe, would be instantly perverted to the demolition . . . of everything public and private."

The social scientist, like the historian, would be interested in the reconstruction of the background of the passage, and would add this to the total interpretation. The word *we* would strike him at once. Who were the *we?* Whom did they represent? What interests of theirs were at stake? Were they rich or poor, bond or free? He would realize that the writer of the words owned slaves, and would see the bearing of this fact upon the concept of a creation in equality and liberty. He might also question and analyze the exact meaning carried here by the word *rights*. He would know that there is no political "right" without a corresponding *law* by which it is upheld. Can the same be said of "moral" and "natural" right? Is capital punishment an infringement of man's "unalienable right to life"? Bentham's [1] analysis of "rights" is apposite here, and the social scientist would consider such of his statements as:

If I say a man has a right to this coat or this piece of land, meaning a right in the political sense of the word, what I assert is a matter of fact; namely the existence of the disposition . . . as above. [The disposition or willingness of functionaries of government, which causes the man to enjoy the benefit.] If I say a man has a natural right to the coat or the land—all that it can mean, if it mean any thing and mean true, is that I am of opinion he ought to have a political right to it;

[1] C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), pp. 119–120.

that, by the appropriate services rendered upon occasion to him by the appropriate functionaries of government, he ought to be protected and secured in the use of it: he ought to be so —that is to say, the idea of his being so is pleasing to me, the idea of the opposite result displeasing.

The natural scientist,[1] in turn, might look to his experience and knowledge to test the inductive validity of the axioms and postulates. What, in nature, are man's "rights"? Has he a "right" to life? How have the scientific concepts since Darwin perhaps modified the philosophical basis from which Jefferson wrote? If man is subject to the same "natural laws" as other animals, has he any "right" to survival without a corresponding "struggle for existence," a struggle which, in man's case, is social as well as individual; social, in that he survives by coöperation, which involves a sacrifice of personal liberty; and individual, in that he has no "right" to life which is not conditioned upon his maintaining bodily health. From the point of view of the natural scientist, man has no more a "right" to life than a tiger in the Indian jungle. In fact, if man and tiger are face to face, their respective rights to life are a matter of some dispute.

An English teacher would be primarily interested, perhaps, in other but similar questions. Why is it that the words of the Virginia *Bill of Rights,* with its "are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights . . . etc." fail to stir emotions in the reader, while Jefferson's passage carries an emotional appeal? It is not merely because we know and have associations with Jefferson's words; not merely because we have often heard them

[1] For a discussion of the rôle of science teachers in teaching language, see Committee on the Function of Science in General Education of the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum (Progressive Education Association), *Science in General Education* (New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), pp. 325–342.

quoted. There is another side to the question. They are often quoted because they are always quotable, and can always be relied upon to achieve the intended effect, almost the effect achieved by poetry, which they must have achieved to some degree when they were first written. Is this passage, then, one in which the emotional content overshadows the literal sense-meaning? Is the language, in other words, primarily referential or emotive? What was the purpose of the writer—to convey information, or to express or engender feelings and attitudes, or both? Assuming it to be referential, what then are the definitions of the key words? In what sense are his propositions "truths"? Are they beliefs and opinions, or facts? Is the statement equivalent to: "We believe these things are, or ought to be so"; or "We wish they were so; but we cannot prove them"? Is *all men* to be taken literally, as *all*, without reference to race, heredity, or environment at birth? In the use of *rights*, again, the English teacher also would look for a possible shift or ambiguity. Are the "rights" with which men are "endowed by their Creator" of the same sort as "rights" that have to have governments to secure them? If anything is the "unalienable" gift of God, like the air we breathe, do we need any other agency to secure it to our use? Is, then, the same word used to mean two different things? Again, is *equal* to be interpreted only in the light of the two clauses that follow it? In other words, is the sense, "Men are equal, in that they are endowed by their Creator with these rights." Is it the same, that is, as it would be if the semicolon after *equal* were changed to a colon?

Is *governments* used in the sense of a collection of men who govern—as in "There is now a strong minority in the government"? Or is it used in the sense of the process of governing—as in "Americans believe in orderly government"? The latter sense seems to be closer here. But

the colonies already had such a government. The argument must therefore be that their government was not "just," because not "by consent of the governed." *Just* in this context can be interpreted only as meaning by such consent. The word *just* appears as a monosyllabic qualifier to *powers*, scarcely noticed in reading. Yet does it not—or should it not—carry the weight of the argument and proof? For certainly the proposition that the only just powers of governments are those derived from the consent of the people is a debatable proposition. Was it not, in fact, the very center of the question? Has an all-important question, then, been begged by the insertion of that innocent-looking monosyllabic qualifier *just?* Is there not, in this last phrase, a hidden postulate?

There is scarcely a word in this passage, in fact, that would not lend itself profitably to scrutiny, analysis, exposition, and definition, from various points of view.

All of the branches of study, but perhaps more particularly English, contribute moreover to an intelligent answer to the first questions to be asked about anything we read. *"How is it to be read?"* Certainly we are not to subject everything we read to this detailed interpretation from various points of view. A knowledge of language could not be said to meet the needs of everyday life unless it included the ability to determine by a sort of preliminary hasty scanning the particular reading techniques which should be employed in dealing with the given passage. The exact answer will always be individual, not absolute. The best way to read any passage of whatever length will always depend upon who is reading, what he is reading, and for what purpose he is reading. But the individual is handicapped in his selection of a pace and method of reading suitable to the discourse and his purposes, as well as in his ability to read well in whatever pace and method he selects,

unless he knows something of the way in which language works. He should, for instance, be able to find in the *intent* of the writer some clue as to the seriousness and care with which the passage should be read; and he should be able to see from the general purport of the passage which words are likely to be the key words, the controversial words, the words needing exposition and expansion. We believe that the study of language of the kind advocated in this report will bring with it increasingly intelligent approach to the question of suiting the manner of reading to the thing read. The language used puts a good reader on his guard for the kind of interpretation that is necessary.

It should be noted here that the close kind of interpretation to which we have subjected some of these opening words of the *Declaration of Independence* might never be carried on in exactly this way with this or any other passage in a classroom. It is given rather as an example of the many branches of knowledge and experience which a particular kind of interpretation may require. In the classroom, the passage selected for interpretation should be something within the student's interest—some passage of which the interpretation would give him new information or fresh ideas useful and interesting to him. Otherwise interpretation will seem to him to be a sterile, perfunctory, pedantic business. In the process of interpretation, similarly, he should draw as much as possible from his own experience. As we shall show later, it is the reader's experience that gives words their meaning for him. In reading we must start from what we know. Reading can and should add to our knowledge; but the reader's own experience is his point of departure into new ideas presented to him by the writer. Without such foundation in experience, words become sounds, not symbols. If by chance the above pas-

sage is under consideration, for example, the interpretation of *rights* from the student's point of view might be the starting point. What "rights" has he in school and home? What does he mean by *rights* when he uses the word in this personal setting? What are the bases and safeguards of these "rights"?

To a reasonably full reading of this passage, to what we have called an interpretation of it, then, social studies, mathematics, history, science, English, all make their contributions. Reading in this full sense can hardly be called the province of English alone. Or if we insist upon the traditional terminology and divisions, and call reading a part of English alone, then it at once becomes clear how teachers in other subjects are teachers of English; for they are teaching toward a fuller reading ability on the part of the student. It is clear in this illustration, moreover, that this full ability to read or to interpret the passage is considerably damaged if the analysis put upon it by any one field is lacking. A student who has kept the logic of his mathematics in an airtight compartment, to be used for mathematics alone, and has never seen how these mathematical patterns may occur in discourse carried on with purely verbal symbols, is at considerable disadvantage. So also is the student who has got into the way of thinking that the uses of language he has learned in his English classes have no universal application; that a writer's mood and intent, his emotive use of words, are of importance in the interpretation of a sonnet, but can have no bearing in the analysis of prose.

Full and intelligent reading, or interpretation, is central to education in two senses: first, the learning process in modern life is to a large extent conditioned by an ability fully to interpret the printed passage; second, this ability can be achieved in education only through the coöperation

of teachers in every field. As pointed out elsewhere in this report, moreover, the reader's experience in life, in school and out of school, is vital to his knowledge and use of language. However far words may go into the abstract, it is the realities of human experience that give them meaning. Writing is not mere verbal manipulation that follows *a priori* rules, but an attempt to portray or explore realities through words. Reading, conversely, is more than an analysis of forms and patterns; it is an attempt to get at the realities the writer is attempting to set forth. Reading, in this full sense, is not, as was once and still is generally supposed, a "skill" which can be and should be taught in the isolation and insulation of the English class.

It should be clear, moreover, from this illustration that a teacher of social science who so analyzes and interprets by words the material of the social sciences is not teaching merely "English," as he usually believes he is doing when he merely corrects spelling and punctuation; but in such a process of close, analytical reading, he is teaching social science as well. Moreover, if through his English and all other classes, a student has acquired this ability more fully to interpret various forms of discourse, teachers in all subjects share equally in the benefits. That all experiences, and hence all curricular subjects, are closely interrelated is no longer a pious academic theory. It is a human fact.

The illustration we have chosen for analysis is an historical document written to prove, or to justify, a certain conclusion. History, social science, mathematics, and science are involved in its reading, more, perhaps, than they all would be in much of the run-of-the-mine reading required of the secondary-school student today. At the same time, any reader who is on the alert will constantly find himself drawing upon his experience and knowledge in various fields in making his interpretations; and the pas-

sage is rare indeed that requires, for full interpretation, light shed from one source alone.

However relatively important or unimportant the scientific, historical, mathematical, or social contribution may be in dealing with any given passage, English, the language, is always involved. In fact, the whole process of reading and interpretation, and the contributions made to it by other subjects, are conditioned by that ability to use language which we believe should be one of the major concerns of the teacher of English. In the following sections of this report we therefore deal in more detail with the teaching of English, the language, as a part of English, the curriculum subject.

We have taken our illustration from reading. The same points, however, could be made about any other of the learning activities in which language plays a part: the ordering of thought; the acquisition and formulation of new knowledge; composition, oral or written; these and other complicated activities which we generally group together under the term *communication*. In all of these, language plays a central part; and in every subject in which these processes are involved, the teacher is to some extent a teacher of language. Thus, for instance, a student who writes an essay in his history class may find, by subjecting it later to this same sort of careful scrutiny, that he has taken too little into account the deductive logic of his mathematics, the inductive and empirical logic of his physics, or the careful and controlled definition of his terms, the emotive quality of his words, or the use of metaphor, which he has studied in his English class. In writing, as in reading, all pertinent materials and concepts must be considered.

Conversely, it is of primary importance for the teacher of English to take into account the bearing of all other sub-

jects and of all the experiences of his everyday life upon the student's own written work in English. Mere verbalism might otherwise creep into a student's writing as easily as into his reading. By way of illustration of this point let us consider the use, in the student's composition, of the word *because*. There is a general tendency of English teachers directly to admonish students to "avoid simple and compound sentences by using subordination." Such a general admonition is usually followed by a list of ways in which subordination may be effected; a list, moreover, given upon a purely verbal basis, invariably accompanied by the advice to use "participial phrases" and "subordinate clauses," —a few of each. A list of subordinating conjunctions, such as *because, as, when,* is usually given as a ready aid for achieving the desired stylistic result.

It is true that grammatical and verbal subordination can be achieved by following these simple directions. For instance, the pairs of simple sentences:

Lightning has struck the barn. It is burning down.
It was raining. I came into the house.

can be converted into:

The barn is burning down because lightning has struck it.
I came into the house because it was raining.

A young student can quite easily be taught by the usual methods of drill to effect these subordinations in his writing in his English class. But the English teacher should realize that there is more involved here than mere grammatical construction and "sentence variety." In the first place, in the two sentences given, the causal relationships differ widely. The causal relationship between the rain and the going into the house is not as immediate, direct, and inevitable as that between the lightning and the fire. In fact, the sense of the second sentence is rather, "My *reason*

for going into the house was that it was raining." The immediate *cause* of the fire, on the other hand, was the lightning. The point is that no mere verbal tricks with sentences in English class will begin to make clear to the student the vitally important, diverse, and intricate concepts of "cause." To teach him to use the word *because* to describe a situation in which he himself has not seen the things happening one because of another, or because of a train of others, is simply to obscure those complex relationships in life for which the word can and should stand. From our earliest years through adult life the revelation of cause and effect and of other relationships continues to grow and expand. These relationships should be seen in experience, not merely stated through verbally acquired tricks of style.

The English teacher, in dealing with *because* in all its uses, can and should draw heavily upon the student's work in the sciences and mathematics. The building up of the meanings of the cause-effect relationship is no small part of the work of the scientist. Mathematics can add the whole related concept of "function," through which a student learns that some things stand in a particular sort of quasi-causal relationship to each other. For instance, the *distance* one can see in miles is a *function* of his *height* in feet above the ground as expressed in the formula, $d = 1.22 \sqrt{h}$. In language this idea could be expressed, roughly, by *because* or *if*. "We can see so many miles because (*or* if) we are at such an elevation." But a student who has learned to distinguish between cause-and-effect and function in his science and mathematics classes should be encouraged in his writing (and reading) of English to notice which relationship is involved in the discourse under consideration.

Not only does a purely verbal approach to such a problem concentrate the student's mind on how he is saying something rather than on what he is really saying, why he

is saying it, and what grounds he has for saying it, but it is also likely to do violence to his own interpretation of his own experiences. In a recent discussion of the topic of composition, a teacher gave as an example of a young student's actual writing a passage similar to the following:

I went down to the beach. I saw a boat. The name of the boat was *Mary*.

He went on to illustrate the "success" of his method of teaching by exhibiting what the pupil had done under his instructions to subordinate:

Upon reaching the beach, I saw a boat whose name was *Mary*.

Here events were to the pupil three separate experiences, each vivid, each in its own right memorable. The sentences as first written admirably reveal the pupil's feeling toward this experience. Nothing useful is gained by instructing the child to write about events in a way in which he did not experience them. Such a process is likely only to make even wider the separation between experience and language, which it should be one of the primary objects of language study to eliminate.

Similarly, in our example about the lightning and the barn, anyone, young or old, might be pardoned if in the excitement of the moment he saw these two events as two separate occurrences without giving particular attention to their causal relationship. The lightning flashes; there is an almost simultaneous explosion of thunder; and there is the barn a burst of flames. From that point on he is engrossed in getting out the horses and trying to save the house. It is not until the insurance agent comes out the next morning that he has to subordinate, and stress the fact that the barn burned down because the lightning struck it. In any composition, moreover, the choice between the two

forms would depend upon the effects intended. To give the feeling of excitement, the disjunctive form is better; for the report to the insurance company, the subordinated.

Just how far can a study of relationships (relationships expressed by words like *because, if,* and *although*), approached purely through language, help the student to realize the corresponding relationships in actual life in the world about him? It seems safe to say that the two processes—seeing relationships between events and writing about them in words—can and should go along together. There is a tendency in the teaching of English today, however, to develop the purely verbal approach, divorced from the realization of actual experience. The entirely legitimate suggestion of some rhetoric textbooks that it is possible and sometimes profitable to teach students by direct methods how to use subordinate constructions is taken too often as an edict to teach subordination at all levels of age and maturity, for all rhetorical purposes. In the process logical discriminations are too likely to be lost in purely verbal manipulations. They are surely lost if the student cannot grasp them in terms of his own experience.

This tendency to teach subordinate relationships from too purely a verbal level is easily explained, and illustrates a fallacy in the teaching of English which shows itself in various other ways. The reasoning upon which such teaching is based seems to run about as follows: "Mature and intelligent writers generally do not use many simple or compound sentences. They achieve sentence variety through subordination. Therefore, by teaching my students to achieve sentence variety through subordination, I shall be making them more mature and intelligent."

Cause and effect here have been completely confused. A symptom of a condition has been mistaken for the condition itself. Men and women are not intelligent because they

use subordinating constructions. Part of their maturity consists in their ability, increased through the years, to see an increasing number of more and more intricate relationships in the world about them. Like children, they simply use language to express what they have seen, and thus use subordinating conjunctions as naturally as a child uses *and—then—and*. The formal teaching of the use of subordinating conjunctions entirely divorced from experience, before the child has seen the relationships existing in the world he knows, will give, then, only an appearance of intelligence and maturity which may satisfy teacher or examiner, but which will hardly be of any particular benefit to the child.

It seems probable, moreover, that the mature writer uses the subordination method in his sentences because he looks in perspective toward the past, no matter whether he is creating abstractions and generalizations or analyzing experience in an essay. The younger the writer the more apt he is to survey life from the point of view of the present. The *event* to him is more vivid than the *cause*. In other words, the event is nearer to him than the cause and prevents him from seeing the cause. In fact, the *event* has set up so vivid an emotional reaction that he does not bring his mind to bear upon the event in order to analyze it— that is, in order to seek after its causal or other relationships with other events, past or present, or to see in it any similarity to past events which might lead him toward a generalization.

The same may be said of teaching single words from lists by dictionary definitions. Studies have been made purporting to show close relationship between high vocabulary-test scores and "intelligence," success in school and college, and professional success. Teachers have perhaps been over-hasty in arguing from this that teaching word-

lists will increase "intelligence" and the chances for success. The same fallacy is operative here. High vocabulary scores, in so far as they are significant at all, are significant probably because they indicate a wide experience with things and people, and with books read and understood in terms of things and people. They are symptoms of intelligence and maturity, not their causes. There are no grounds for believing that we can create intelligence by teaching words from lists.

Such practices are analogous to trying to cheer a child who has dropped his only nickel down a drain by telling him to smile and teaching him by example how to do it. A smile may or may not encourage happiness; it does not create it. Another nickel, accompanying the smile, might really create it; a dime would be almost sure to. Just so, merely verbal training may encourage the growth of the child toward "intellectual maturity"; it cannot create such growth. Only greater experience accompanied by its verbal equivalent can create such growth.

One of the real dangers of isolating language teaching in English classes, away from other subjects, then, is that it will become merely verbal. Other subjects, in such ways as we have indicated, can supply data for the uses of the English teacher in composition as well as in reading; for in writing, as in reading, all pertinent materials must be considered.

If teachers in all subjects should become, as we have suggested, at least in part teachers of certain elements of language, can lines be drawn between what aspects of language should be taught in one class, and what in another? Certainly no hard and fast line could or should be drawn. But it is safe to suggest certain general principles upon which a workable division might be made. In the first place, the administrative details of any division that might

be made may differ widely from school to school; these seem to us to be of minor importance. It does not make much difference of what department a teacher considers himself to be a member when he is teaching some aspect of language; nor is it of particular significance that in one school language is taught in certain classes at certain stated times, whereas in another no classes are definitely labeled "language hours." In fact, it is our belief that an administrative division is less likely to prove successful than a functional division.

A teacher of science may at any moment find himself and his class confronted with what is, in essence, a problem in language; and when this happens, the science teacher, if he is a teacher at all, is a teacher of language. When he finds, for example, that a student has reached a faulty conclusion through attributing to a scientific law all the characteristics of a statute law, he must deal with the shift in the meaning of the word *law*. He will probably enter into a discussion of the different ways these "laws" are established, and so, through reference to actual things in the laboratory and to actual men at voting booths and in legislative halls, make clear to his students the different meanings that this word may have. Whether, at the moment, he considers himself to be teaching science or English or social studies is immaterial.

Similarly, the English teacher, in discussing, let us say, Meredith's sonnet "Lucifer in Starlight" may find it necessary, in dealing with the words "The army of unalterable law," to engage in the same kind of discussion about the same word. He cannot teach words, divorced from experience, simply as sounds, but must get back to things and men; he must, in other words, base his language teaching in this instance on science and social science. What kind of teacher he calls himself for the moment does not matter.

It would be bootless for the science teacher and the English teacher to try to set up any administrative division; for the English teacher to say, for instance, "You teach the facts of science, and I will teach how words may shift their meanings"; or "You teach *law* and I'll teach *beauty*"; or for the school administrator to say to the science teacher, "Teach the language of your subject at 9:15 on alternate Tuesdays."

Another general principle arises naturally from this situation. If language teaching cannot be segregated or confined to one or two classrooms, and if no sharp lines can be drawn between the parts of the work to be done in each, if, in other words, every teacher becomes in fact a teacher of language, it is clear that there should be a common or at least harmonious opinion on the part of teachers as to what language is, what language does, how language does what it does, how language serves us, and how language may mislead us. Operations should be carried on from the same base. Direct teaching of the theory of language will probably not enter into any class, except possibly the English class, and then only on occasion; but every teacher in a subject in which language is used should at least be certain that his teaching is in harmony with a sound doctrine of language. If all teachers hold the same doctrine, or compatible doctrines, of language, the language teaching of all classes will be coördinated, and will be built up in the student's mind into a coherent system. This does not mean that all teachers should be philologists or etymologists, or that it is necessary to have a philologist or etymologist on the school staff, but that it would be profitable for any teacher to know something of the way words work, and to examine the bearing of language upon his subject.

Finally, as far as it is possible to draw any line between the province of English and other studies in the field of

teaching language, it may be safe to assume that it is the special province of English teachers to provide and describe for all teachers this common doctrine of language; similarly, to coördinate the language studies carried on in other subject fields; and to provide for students the special techniques necessary for meeting fully and successfully whatever demands may be put upon their ability to use language. It may be considered the province of all subject fields to contribute to language those experiences, materials, and concepts without which words are merely sounds unrelated to any realities.

Perhaps we had better add at this point that what we here advocate is not a "correlated curriculum" as this term has generally been understood. We are not concerned either with criticizing or upholding any particular method of curriculum organization. The sort of subject coöperation in the problems of language which we advocate is not merely another "core" or "center" for curriculum correlation. It can be carried on within or without a "correlated curriculum." It does not set up language as a "core" subject. We set up not a "plan" but a point of view: the point of view that functionally language is basic to general education. We are not concerned with administrative methods, or with one type of curriculum as against another. Whatever the curriculum, our position is simply that teachers should realize the importance of language to every subject, and should coöperate within any frame of curriculum to give the students the highest possible ability to use and to understand words, always remembering that to affect students vitally, secondary education must be inductive. That is, it must be based upon the students' growing experience. Their experience is so real to them that no book learning can be compared with it, unless such book learning can be made to clarify, order, or amplify their own experience.

III

LANGUAGE TEACHING
IN THE FIELD OF ENGLISH

BEFORE DISCUSSING in detail the part played by the teacher of English in this coöperative venture of teaching language, let us turn to an examination of the subject-field of English, and establish within that field the position of language teaching: its present position, and what might be considered its ideal position.

The divisions of English study for the most part generally recognized in secondary schools today are literature, composition, grammar, rhetoric; and to these must be added numerous activities in which words play some part, such as telephoning, table conversation, organizing a club, appreciation of moving-pictures, and similar occupations, which have recently become a part of the direct teaching material of the English course. Of these divisions, only two, grammar and rhetoric, deal directly with the study of language.

These two branches of English study have had a long history, which in recent years has not been an altogether happy one. They go back in unbroken line to the medieval trivium—grammar, rhetoric, and logic—which formed for a long period the basis of a liberal education. During an age when the aim and mark of such an education was skill in disputation, when men still believed that new truth could be discovered only through words, and through words by themselves, the trivium was the inevitable and

reasonable basis for all education. Men studied grammar, rhetoric, and logic in the same spirit as that in which men today study through microscope and telescope the structure of cells and constellations; and the purpose for studying the trivium was the same as that which today motivates our scientists. It remained for modern philosophers and scientists, from Bacon to Einstein, to show the futility of the search for knowledge through the syllogism, to point to the vanity of the use of words divorced from experience, to demonstrate that conclusions not based upon and checked with operations are either false or meaningless. But in the Middle Ages the spirit of the trivium was a liberal spirit, and its purpose was the quest for what men believed to be higher knowledge, new truth. Gradually, as the methods of scientific investigation began to take hold, other studies and methods became the spear-head of this search for new knowledge, until finally the traditional grammar, rhetoric, and logic are no longer the major concern of all liberally educated men, but have become the special province of a comparatively few scholars.

Educators have realized, throughout the intervening years, that the medieval trivium stood for something vital in education, without fully seeing what that something was, or how that something has imperceptibly been taken over in large part from grammar, rhetoric, and logic, into the materials of the many other subjects which have been added to the curriculum during the past two or three hundred years. For many years after these three subjects had lost the vitality of purpose which once was theirs, they were given an honored place in the curriculum. Only recently has the old, formal logic practically disappeared from our colleges. Grammar and rhetoric, at least in name, still remain in our schools. But they are distinctly on the defensive. Some teachers have entirely abandoned them. Others

are still teaching them, but with grave misgiving. To be sure, they still have many able defenders; but the fact that today these subjects need defenders is in itself significant. It is probably true, moreover, that they have been fighting a rear-guard action for the past decade or more.

What can account for this retreat of grammar and rhetoric from the field of English? It is reasonable to assume that one of two major causes might have brought about this striking phenomenon. Either teachers have found that the language ability of their students is sufficient without teaching language in the schools; or the teaching of grammar and rhetoric has not accomplished the purposes for which it is undertaken. It is worth while to examine these two hypotheses.

First, do our students possess such power over language that we can dispense with the subject in the schools? Students possess language, certainly. Do they possess it to the degree necessary to meet the demands of the present-day curriculum, and of contemporary intelligent adult life? The fact that grammar and rhetoric have formed a traditional part of English studies in the past has been a tacit admission that our students do not, if left to themselves, acquire the working knowledge of language that they need. Most teachers today would agree that the best available evidence points to the inescapable conclusion that our students do not have the control and mastery over language which is essential for fully meeting their needs, and which should therefore be expected from a general education.

This lack of power over language is, in fact, a widespread phenomenon. I. A. Richards,[1] of Cambridge University, has amassed evidence that even university undergraduates are not able to understand poetry and prose that they meet in

[1] I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* and *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929, 1938).

course sufficiently well for their purposes. F. L. Lucas,[1] of the same university, writes: "I used to think it the object of English to make people well read. I have come to see that its aim must be to teach them how to read. They have the rest of their lives to read in." Ernest Horn[2] states that "investigation after investigation has piled up evidence of serious inadequacies in the ability of students to understand what they read," and documents this statement by numerous references to such investigations and studies. The example we have given from the Declaration of Independence will serve as an illustration of the difficulties involved in reading—difficulties which can hardly be met if the acquisition of the power to deal with language is left to casual, out-of-school experiences, not supplemented by language teaching in the schools.

Teachers generally are becoming aware of students' lack of ability in language. Can it be that English teachers are paying less and less attention to teaching grammar and rhetoric because they alone believe that their students are sufficiently well equipped to meet the language requirements involved in the English course? It is pertinent here to examine the bearing of language upon the traditional branches of English studies we have already enumerated: literature, composition, grammar, rhetoric, and miscellaneous activities. For, after all, English is a language. Whatever happens in an English classroom, however far English, the classroom subject, may stray from its base of English, the language, however the teaching of English may suffer from a surfeit of teaching it as everything except

[1] Quoted in I. A. Richards, *Basic in Teaching: East and West,* Psyche Miniatures, General Series No. 72 (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1935), p. 56.

[2] Ernest Horn, *Methods of Instruction in the Social Studies,* American Historical Association, Report of the Commission on the Social Studies, Part XV (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 151, 164–196.

a language, still the fact remains incontrovertible: English
is a language. To what extent does the successful teaching
of the traditional branches of English study depend upon
the student's mastery of English, the language? To what
extent do these branches of English study, as at present
taught, contribute to this mastery over English, the lan-
guage?

Literature we can define as whatever has been written
in the language. English is a language which, unlike some
primitive languages, has a body of writing, a literature. Let
us here accept for the moment the view that whatever is
written in a language is its literature. A science or history
textbook is literature in this sense; so is a newspaper story,
a display advertisement, the electric sign on the Times
Building, or a "No Parking" sign. It is all literature under
the definition of literature as words written in a language
for the purpose of conveying or preserving meaning or
meanings.

It is at once clear that for the purposes of education cer-
tain things must be selected from this vast body of litera-
ture; that they are selected for certain purposes under
certain criteria, either by teachers or by learners. A selec-
tion may be made in terms of intrinsic value, however that
value may be determined, or in terms of student need, but
it must be made. In a sense, the formulation, or at least the
carrying out of an educational philosophy or policy, has as
its indispensable accompaniment the selection of certain
literature and the rejection of certain other literature ac-
cording to whatever purposes and criteria are considered
valid.

What is generally called English literature by English
teachers is then a minutely small part of the whole bulk of
things written in the English language, especially selected
for certain purposes and by certain criteria, or perhaps

"naturally selected" by general consent of readers over a long period of time. It would avoid confusion in our thinking if we had another name for this small section of English literature, calling it, for instance, "Great Works." It is not our present purpose to specify what values, or whose, determine "greatness" in literature, but simply to emphasize the fact that what is commonly called "English Literature" is in reality but a very small part of what has been written in English—the total of English literature spelled with a small *l*. Should we adopt a different terminology, our consciousness of the fact that a selective process of some sort has gone on might become sharper; and we might eventually come to an understanding of this selective process *which would go a long way toward a clarification of the aims of teaching this branch of English studies*. It is sufficient for our present purpose, however, to relate the study of English literature to English, the language, by pointing out that English literature is not necessarily and in fact is not at present generally a study of English (the language), but a widely varied study of diverse aspects of certain selected works that happen to have been written in English.

It is quite clear, however, that the degree to which the student can benefit by a study of English literature is proportional to the degree to which he brings insight and critical and appreciative attitudes to what he reads. This power to understand is directly dependent upon his power over language. For English-the-language is the root from which the study of literature grows and by which it is fed— a root which reaches to and springs from the soil of life and experience. The point has already been made that a vigorous selective process has gone on to establish out of all English literature (all things written in English) the small body of material upon which English teachers in

schools and colleges spend much of their time—the English literature of school and college courses and catalogues. How has this selection been made? How does a study of "English literature" differ from a study of "history"? In many ways it does not. Where it chiefly differs, however, is in the fact that English literature tends to confine its material to books which are "well written." This, consciously or unconsciously, is one of the chief criteria of selection.

In other words, "English literature" is concerned primarily with authors who use the English language better than other authors; that is, who express meaning better, or who are able through words to express more meanings. Here, of course, we use *language* and *meaning* in the widest sense, to include whatever kinds of meaning can be expressed and have been expressed through language: fact, idea, emotion, or any form of experience, in all the forms which language may take, such as novel, play, or poem. The study of language, as we shall see, resolves itself into a study of meanings—of what words come to mean, and of how words come to have the meanings that they do have. The study of English literature is generally pursued, then, among books which are in part chosen because of their successful use of language. Language, however, is operative not only in the original selection of these books from the whole body of English literature, but also in the study of selected material after time, teachers, and publishers have made the selection. A study of English literature begins, of necessity, with reading the English language, and its other values depend upon the effectiveness with which this language is read. A competent study of literature begins with an understanding of the meanings of what is written, however far it may and should travel from this starting point. The greater the control over language, the greater will be the

power to realize the author's meanings, and the wider and firmer the basis for the study of other things which derive from literature and for which literature is and should be taught in the schools.

Where, on the other hand, the comprehension of language is insufficient to enable the reader to grasp the author's meanings, the student not only has failed to see and understand those things which made for the inclusion of that particular book in the body of "Great Works," but also has consequently substituted something actually quite different from that book. The fact that two people read a book with the same title is no guarantee that they are reading the same book. In fact, there is no chance that they are reading the same book. If the substitution made by the student is wide enough, he might better be spending his time in reading something else. For him Shakespeare, let us say, may have no advantage over a detective story. A good reading of *The Sign of the Four* may be better than a bad reading of *Othello*.

We must emphasize here, once again, the fact that control over language, or what we have called the realization of language, cannot be acquired through words alone, but only as words have been connected with the realities of experience. This at once points to the conclusion that in understanding what is read, the experience of the reader is of more importance than any index of the hypothetical difficulty of the words used based on word counts or on more subjective data. It might be possible, for example, to write within Thorndike's[1] first 5,000 words a discourse quite beyond the comprehension of a young reader who

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[1] Edward L. Thorndike, *A Teacher's Word Book of the Twenty Thousand Words Found Most Frequently and Widely in General Reading for Children and Young People*, revised edition (New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932).

knew the dictionary meanings of all the words used. This factor is perhaps not sufficiently considered in selecting or advising books in secondary schools.

Composition, as related to the basic fact that English is a language, becomes the process of expression of meaning or meanings in English, and is of necessity more closely bound to a study of the English language than what we have for the moment called "Great Works." For in the study of "Great Works" the emphasis may at any point be placed upon the narration of events, the reconstruction of a scene, the examination of ethics, philosophy, history, or numerous other subjects, with no particular concern as to how these things have come into existence in literature through English; whereas in composition there is always the necessity of taking the narrative, the scene, the doctrine, or the historical concept, and giving them being in English. The direct dependence of composition upon language is then quite clear. Whatever the aim of composition at any point in the scale, from creative or free writing of prose and poetry to strictly literal and fixed scientific description (if indeed there is any such writing), it is an art the medium of which is language. The ability of the writer to express himself to himself with satisfaction and to others with some degree of fullness and accuracy is a language ability. Insufficient power over language hampers a writer, whereas a growing power over language not only strengthens his ability to express himself, but, by virtue of the direct connection of language with the acquisition and organizing of experience, may also expand his desire for expression and enrich the fund of things which he has to express. Like the teaching of literature, the teaching of composition may or may not be directly a training in the power over English. By its very nature, however, it is more likely to be so, even when language training as such is not

the primary or even a conscious aim of the teacher. Certainly, the soundness of the teaching, whatever its emphasis or direction, depends upon the soundness of the principles of language on which the teaching is consciously or unconsciously based. Composition is the control over language in an active state.

The connection is even more close between language and grammar and rhetoric. Language is the beginning and end of studies in grammar and rhetoric; language is the stuff in which they work, and they have their only justification in a curriculum as studies through which a better control over language can be acquired. Grammar and rhetoric are the only studies always and of necessity concerned with the direct teaching of language, with the single aim of improving the control over language. Relating grammar to English, the language, we see that it becomes a study of the way words work in English. So also rhetoric becomes broadly a study of the effect upon other human minds of words in combination in English. Grammar and rhetoric are studies *of* language, while literature is a study of whatever is written about *in* language, and composition a study of how to express meanings *in* language.

Lastly, the so-called "experiences in English," which have recently absorbed more and more of the time devoted to English classes and of the thought of English teachers in secondary schools, can be defined as the study of any human activity or occupation in which English, the language, is used. It is obvious that there is no limit in a highly verbalized society to the number of directions these studies can take, or to the extent to which they can be pushed in any direction. The fact, for instance, that we usually speak in English at the dinner-table is taken as sufficient warrant for teaching table-manners in the English classroom. Bound to English in the first place by purely fortuitous ties, the study

of these activities rarely becomes a study of English, and remains almost wholly a study of the activities themselves which involve the language.

The dependence upon language of these many activities which have in recent years been rushed into the English curriculum is more difficult to analyze, for the reason that the purposes for which they have been introduced are by no means uniform or even clear. We have seen, however, that these widely diverse activities have been brought into the English classroom because they are based in some way, however remotely, upon language. So far as these activities can be legitimately considered to be a part of an English curriculum, therefore, they cannot effectively be carried on except to the degree to which the student has an ability to use English. Whether or not they contribute to this ability, however, is at present questionable.

We have seen, then, that language ability is fundamental to successful pursuit of all subjects in the curriculum, and we have examined in detail the dependence of English studies upon this ability.

But perhaps the strongest claim that can be made for the importance of teaching language grows out of the close connection between language and the processes of ordered thinking. The most widespread criticism of present-day secondary education can be summarized in the words, "Boys and girls do not learn how to think." This criticism can probably be leveled at many, if not indeed all, subjects in the field of education. Although there are individual schools and teachers who are aware of this weakness in education and who make directed and occasionally successful efforts to combat it, no one will seriously deny that the criticism holds for secondary education as a whole. The increasing discussion among teachers about how and where to "teach thinking" is ample evidence that educators them-

selves recognize more and more the desirability of teaching something of the technique of orderly thinking.

Teaching language is teaching the technique of classifying, sorting, ordering, clarifying experiences—the technique of thinking straight. It is, of course, true that verbal thinking is not the only kind of thinking. Nor is it the only kind of thinking which can be called logical. In the present state of our knowledge it would be dangerous to consider verbalized thinking as necessarily the highest or even the most general type. Certainly the artist and inventor must think to a large extent in images; there is a kinetic kind of thinking, a sort of thinking with the hands, which must also be considered logical. An architect and a builder might be unable to express in words the processes by which they created their design and gave it form; yet the building stands and creates on the mind an impression of rightness and beauty. It is difficult again in our present state of knowledge to know for a certainty just what proportion of our students are destined to do their best thinking through things and images rather than through words; and it is even more difficult to know exactly to what extent verbal thinking is or may be made of importance to any given student. At the same time it seems clear that thinking in words must play a large part in the intellectual experience of everyone. As the authors of *The Teaching of English in England* have put it: [1] "It is a common experience that to find fit language for our impressions not only renders them clear and definite to ourselves and to others, but in the process leads to deeper insight and fresh discoveries, at once explaining and extending our knowledge. English is not merely the medium of our thought, it is the very stuff and

[1] Departmental Committee Appointed by the President of the Board of Education to Inquire into the Position of English in the Educational System of England, *The Teaching of English in England* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), p. 20.

process of it." This is in the main true, although we must realize that training in language alone will never be sufficient to gain the desired ends; and that however full and complete the possession of language, there will probably always remain ideas which can be expressed, if at all, only through other media; and that language must be, at every point, identified with experience.

Even though we think sometimes without words, and though we may sometimes express our thinking through various different media, we need to remember that using words is in itself a means toward more or further thought; hence a poor or illogical use of language encourages further bad thinking. It appears, then, that there is need in all subject-fields of teaching ordered thinking; and that such teaching can be done through the teaching of language.

We have examined the first hypothesis that might account for the retreat of grammar and rhetoric from the field of English teaching in the schools, and found that it is not supported by the facts. Students do not, without language teaching, have sufficient proficiency in language. Let us turn to an examination of our second hypothesis. If there is a great need for the teaching of language, as seems to be borne out by evidence on every side, why is it that direct teaching of grammar and rhetoric is on the wane? This question in part answers itself. The teaching of grammar and rhetoric has not produced desirable results, results commensurate with the amount of time once spent upon them, or even noticeable results. We have pointed out that originally these studies were pursued as a means of arriving at new knowledge, in a spirit which, for its time, was a liberal and inquiring spirit.

But their original high purpose has been lost sight of; and the findings of a new science and a new logic have not as yet been allowed to have their full influence toward the

shaping of a new grammar and a new rhetoric. The old traditions and names remain; but they remain only as empty shells and lifeless forms. Grammar as now taught is in deservedly bad repute, not only because the aims of such teaching are obscure, but also because, in the absence of clearly defined aims, method has degenerated into perfunctory routine, the routine of applying the names of Latin constructions to English. This practice had a legitimate value at one time, when the classical heritage was the source and standard of learning. Before the advent of modern linguistic studies, which in the last century and a half have demonstrated the wide varieties of symbolic expression in language, it was commonly assumed that Latin was the touchstone of all languages. This was a perfectly reasonable assumption to make, for the patient accumulation of linguistic data had not yet begun, and there was no material with which the validity of the assumption could be tested. It was taken for granted, then, that every language must have the same number of cases as Latin, that every language must have a masculine, feminine, and neuter gender, that every language must have an indicative and subjunctive mood. A tremendous prestige was attached to recognizing the Latin forms, knowing their names, and transferring this terminology to other languages. To the participants in the classical tradition there was no advantage in freshly examining the facts of any other language. Classical grammar had a high status in its own right.

This linguistic tradition no longer exacts the compelling loyalty that it formerly did, but it still continues to dominate much of our educational practice. Verbs and pronouns still are taught in paradigms; lists of words reputed to be verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or nouns are studied; vocabularies and word lists are memorized out of context. Nomenclature of verb forms follows classical models. Much

is made of analyzing and diagramming sentences and naming the component parts with classical terminology. In fact, the study of English as a language is carried on with little difference in method from that long in use in the study of foreign languages, particularly Latin. Students are solemnly assured that a mastery of formal grammar will make them masters of language; that ease, clarity, conciseness, emphasis, and effectiveness in writing can be achieved by giving attention to the employment of simple relative clauses, clauses introduced by relative pronouns in the oblique cases, adjective prepositional phrases for description and identification, participial phrases in place of adjective and adverbial clauses, various uses of gerunds and infinitives.

Now that this terminology has lost much of its aura of prestige and learning, we can make a more dispassionate inquiry into the value of grammatical concepts and terms. What does a grammatical explanation do? Does it help to explain the meaning of a passage? Much of the value of a grammatical approach will depend, in the first place, upon whom the explanation is intended to help. To native speakers a theoretical exposition of their linguistic practices is often more confusing than helpful. They have learned to manipulate the grammatical patterns and techniques of their language in early childhood, whether their language be English, with its fairly simple but irregular system of grammar, or the more complex inflectional system of Latin, or the highly elaborate polysynthetic system of Navajo. By the time they can be introduced to the terminology of grammar, their use of linguistic form is as natural and unconscious a process as walking or breathing. Just as an analysis of walking defeated the centipede, any abstract explanation to native speakers of what they are already doing may succeed only in interfering with their performance.

A totally different situation confronts the foreign learner of a language. Being unacquainted with the grammatical patterns of the language, he might be aided considerably by an organized description of these patterns. But the degree to which he can profit by direct grammatical explanations will depend upon many factors: upon the formal complexity of the language he is studying, upon his familiarity with the analytic concepts and abstract terminology of grammar, upon his ability to grasp the similarities and differences between the new language and his native one. But the special problems of the foreign learner are of interest only as a point of contrast, for the teacher of English is primarily concerned with native speakers.

The value of grammatical material cannot be assessed without an appreciation of the crucial differences between a native and a foreign approach to a language. Another problem that must be considered in the teaching of grammar is that of the content of grammatical terminology itself. What do grammatical terms refer to? If we take the Latin *"Brutus Caesarem interfecit,"* we can identify *Caesarem* as a proper noun in the accusative case. This is purely a reference to the form of the word, to an inflectional case ending (*-em*) attached to Latin words of a certain class. It is not a reference to meaningful function. There is, in fact, no accusative function. There are a great many functions that happen to be expressed by the accusative case in Latin. If we wish to transfer a grammatical term, such as *accusative* or *objective,* from Latin to English, we must be aware of the fact that the term has reference to a form; the transfer is valid in so far as the English form ("him," for example) is patterned in a case system somewhat analogous to that of Latin.

Even on formal grounds, the transfer is full of dangers of misunderstanding, for the analogy between Latin and

English case patterns is very imperfect indeed. But the transfer is even less appropriate as suggesting similarities in functioning between the Latin and English accusative. We can be sure that the functional scheme of the Latin accusative, the variety of meanings that this form can assume in different contexts, is a unique grammatical pattern peculiar to that language. It is not a univeral linguistic complex, shared by Latin and all other languages. Some languages have many more case forms than Latin, such as certain of the Finnish dialects with their fifteen cases in each declension, and others have only two or three cases; in such linguistic systems, relational functions would necessarily be distributed among the available case forms on a totally different basis from that of Latin. Still other languages—Chinese, for example—have no case forms at all, and relational "case" functions must either remain implicit or be made explicit by the use of non-inflectional techniques, such as word order.

Grammatical terms, for the most part, are used to denote concepts of form. But they may also refer to functions, and this is one of the constant sources of confusion in grammatical discussion. In the English equivalent of the Latin sentence quoted above, "Brutus killed Caesar," it is obvious that the word *Caesar* has no inflectional case form, accusative or otherwise. Though we cannot identify this word as possessing an accusative case ending, we can speak of it as being the functional object, the receiver, of the action described in the sentence. We are merely saying that *Caesar* has been acted upon in some way by someone or something, and we can base our functional interpretation upon the formal clue of word order. Such information may help the foreign learner, unfamiliar with the complexities of English word order, to distinguish the receiver of the activity (*Caesar*) from the doer (*Brutus*); and he can then proceed

to gain a more particularized meaning from the sentence. But reference to so inclusive and general a function is hardly an illumination of the passage to a native of English, who will have grasped the doer-receiver relation on his first reading of the sentence.

Grammatical concepts and terms, then, are useful primarily for identifying formal techniques, and their ultimate reference is to a configurated system of forms, such as the total system of case forms, which provides the grammatical raw material for words in discourse. Grammatical terms are also used for referring to the broad and general functions expressed by the formal techniques of a language. But the deductive application of these terms, particularly for native students, has a limited value in helping to interpret the meaning of words in context.

Undoubtedly much of the sterility of grammar teaching at present lies in its deductive procedure, in its attempt to work from grammatical generalities to the interpretation of specific meanings. This is not a procedure adapted to the needs of the native student of English. It was developed to meet the requirements of the foreign student of Latin, who, in addition, was profoundly attracted by the values of a classical learning in the culture of his time.

Teachers of English have in fact been tricked by the word *grammar*. Originally used broadly to cover almost all branches of a study of language—word forms, philology, and even literature—a study of grammar was of necessity a study of thinking and a study of meanings. Since this was so, there has been an assumption on the part of teachers that a study of whatever is labeled *grammar* of necessity is a study of thinking and meanings. This belief was held even when by the word *grammar* little was meant except the definition of the "parts of speech," and when a knowledge of grammar was considered complete if words, phrases, and

clauses could be sorted into categories of the parts of speech, and if some of these categories could be further divided according to traditional classical models, such as those for the tenses of the verbs, and the cases and constructions of nouns. Since a student who could parse every word, phrase, and clause of a sentence was dealing with words, he was believed to be dealing with grammar; and if with grammar, then with meanings. The teacher of grammar has fallen into the trap which words are constantly setting for us, the very trap the avoidance of which should be one of his chief concerns. Having applied the word *grammar* to what he is teaching, he has not stopped to consider what he is actually doing when he is "teaching grammar," but has assumed that any activity so labeled will accomplish whatever any study called *grammar* has ever accomplished.

In much of his work with grammar, the English teacher has probably assumed that familiarity with the classically derived formal categories is necessary for the student's understanding of everything that he reads. It is, however, only in instances where some of the pronouns are being used that the English reader can get from the word-form used a clue to the meaning, as in the following quotations from Milton:

> Them thus employed beheld
> With pity Heaven's high King. . . .[1]

> There entertain him all the Saints above. . . .[2]

> Him followed his next Mate. . . .[3]

Here Milton has been able to break away from the English word order because he is using some of our scant stock of inflections (*them, him*); and in the second example a singular noun could be substituted for *him* without am-

[1] *Paradise Lost,* Book V, lines 219-220.
[2] *Lycidas,* line 178.
[3] *Paradise Lost,* Book I, line 238.

biguity, by virtue of the use of the present tense, *enter-tain*, which establishes the plural noun as subject. Unless these few inflected forms are used, however, a break from the usual word order will cause at best ambiguity which can be solved only through context, as in these lines from the first speech in Gilbert Murray's translation of *The Hippolytus* of Euripides:

> And that proud Prince, my foe,
> His sire shall slay with curses.

Here, as in most other instances, the English reader must get the meaning from the context before he can know the grammatical construction of the words involved, whereas in Latin or Greek the grammatical forms would actually determine the sense-meaning. The Greek from which Gilbert Murray translates shows by case ending which is the slayer and which the slain, and again by grammatical syntax whether the slaying is done by means of curses or to their accompaniment, and there is no need of context, as there is in English, to resolve these ambiguities.

As a student moves further and further along into more difficult reading, although a familiarity with English order and structure is essential, he is thrown more and more upon context to solve his difficulties. In highly inflected languages, like Latin and Greek, the inflectional complications keep pace with the increasing length and complication of the sentences, and the case endings and verb endings of highly differentiated syntactical systems aid the reader to determine constructions of words, and from these constructions, the meaning. It is in this sense that Latin and Greek are formal languages, and it is for this reason that it is futile to attempt to understand English by means of treating it as if it were formal. In a highly inflected language the grammatical forms of the words can be noticed first by

foreign learners; the forms will point to the syntax, and the syntax to the sense-meaning. In much of our reading of difficult English exactly the opposite process is often at work; and only after the meaning of a passage is understood, can the details of the syntax be seen and the grammatical construction of words be given. In mastering the reading of an English passage, mastery of meanings and mastery of syntax go sometimes hand in hand, sometimes one a little ahead of the other. In reading a complicated passage of an inflected language, mastery of syntax leads and opens up the way for mastery of meaning.

The opening lines of Milton's sonnet "On His Blindness" serve as an illustration:

> When I consider how my light is spent
> Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
> And that one Talent which is death to hide
> Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
> To serve therewith my Maker, and present
> My true account, lest he returning chide;
> "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
> I fondly ask.

In English, the meaning must be understood before grammatical constructions can be assigned to words. A reader is completely baffled until he gets sufficient of the sense to realize that the last three words constitute the main sentence. Similarly, thereafter sense leads the way to understanding the details of grammatical construction. Is the *that* in line 3 a conjunction, and *talent* a nominative, subject of the finite verb *lodged?* Or is *that* a demonstrative pronoun agreeing with *talent,* which is in the objective case, the direct object of *consider,* with *lodged* a past participle in turn objective, in agreement with *talent?* If the first analysis is correct, we get one meaning; if the second, an entirely different one. But we must first decide upon the

meaning, and only after we have done this can we decide upon the grammatical constructions. In Latin, case-endings and verb forms, as grammatical signposts, would at once establish a narrow group of possible meanings from which to select one meaning as the only possible interpretation. In English, especially since we are natives, if we wish to undertake a grammatical analysis according to the classical categories still largely supported by textbooks, we must work entirely from meaning to grammar; in Latin, the foreign translator works largely from forms, to grammar, to meaning.

Examples could be multiplied. In Shelley's "Ozymandias," invariably misread and admired by ninth- and tenth-grade students, the difficulty that often presents itself in the eighth line: "The *hand* that mocked *them*, and the heart that fed," would disappear in a highly inflected language, in which it would at once be clear that *hand* is a direct object and, through its agreement in gender, that *them* refers to *passions*.

A grammatical analysis of such passages in English might considerably aid an unresourceful teacher in explaining the sense-meaning to a reader who has failed to grasp it. He might say, for instance, in the fourth example: "Construe *Prince* as the object and *sire* as subject. Construe *foe* in apposition with *Prince,* and *with curses* as equivalent to an ablative of means." Or, he might conveniently test a pupil's understanding of the sense-meaning of the passages in question by posing grammatical questions about their separate words. He might, for instance, ask for the grammatical construction of the *Prince, foe,* and *sire* in the last passage, and a correct answer would certainly indicate a grasp of the sense. But there are other and better ways of explaining, where necessary, and of examining; and the time spent by the student in acquiring the necessary termi-

nology of the finer points of a Latinized English grammar can hardly be justified by the plea that it has made possible a special kind of test or a special and limited approach to the explanation of the sense-meaning. In fact, an explanation based on a classically derived grammatical construction is not really an English explanation at all, for the sense-meaning in English must be reached through an understanding of the words and passages in their order and context. To this point we shall return later. Any explanation of the sense of passages in English must be based upon a sufficiently full discussion of the whole context to make clear the meanings of the separate passages involved.

Rhetoric has suffered the same sort of deflection as grammar. Originally a step in the process of orderly thought, a step taken in the belief that it would lead to the acquisition of new truth, it was concerned with the concise use of words to express fine shades of meaning—meaning in its widest sense. It has come today to stand in teaching rather for the acquisition of tricks to gloss over a lack of meaning, or simply to ornament, even maliciously, an ambiguity in meaning. We have only to examine our use of the word. If we wish to condemn a speaker for emptiness or insincerity, we call his speech "sheer rhetoric." The teaching of rhetoric today, like the teaching of grammar, suffers from a barren formalism inherited from the ancients without the living spirit which once both created and dwelt in the form. Such teaching centers upon a few arbitrarily selected elements in language and views the living language from these previously chosen standpoints. The many other elements of language, most of them so tenuous as mercifully to have escaped naming and definition, are ignored. The elements that are studied, such as figures of speech, are studied from a formally verbal and confining standpoint with more regard to empty classification and definition than

to the living use of the thing studied to express a full range of meanings in a fluid and organic language. Since rhetoric today is taught more as the embellishment of language than as the use of language to organize thought and to convey meanings, it is not difficult to understand why doubts beset the present-day teacher of the subject.

We have examined then the retreat of grammar and rhetoric from the field of English studies, and have come to the conclusion that it is due not to the conviction on the part of teachers that their students naturally come by a sufficient power over language, but to the ineffectiveness of grammar and rhetoric as now taught to provide the working knowledge of language which most teachers believe their students sorely need.

Is it therefore our intent to eliminate the study of grammar, rhetoric, and logic? Far from it. The tenor of this whole report may on the contrary be said to emphasize the reëstablishment of these studies. Their reëstablishment; but first, their rehabilitation.

The teaching of grammar and rhetoric must be adapted to the language processes of the native English-speaking student. His point of departure in any study of his language is the meaning of words in the context of discourse. However limited his own experience may be, it provides the only basis upon which he can grasp the meaning of passages. There is no need to ignore his natural process of trying to understand verbal contexts through the realities of his experience. This is a vitalizing process for language, and he can be encouraged through teaching to make it a more controlled and discriminating process. Unlike the foreign learner, the native student, if he is to be made consciously aware of the grammatical patterns in his language, must work from meaning to the discovery of grammar. He is ready for the kind of grammatical study that might be

called "operational." That is, the detailed study of language for him must be centered less on isolated verbal forms, and more upon what the forms represent, upon their meaning in terms of the physical and psychological realities of his experience.

What are the patterns in language that reflect these realities? A student will easily recognize that events occur in his experience. Except in special instances, the expression of these events in English includes a reference to a doer and to an action. The grammatical construction of a simple subject and a simple verb (*I walk*) has this doer-action relationship to what takes place in experience. Such an analysis might be extended to include direction words, for some actions involve the direction of movement (*I walk along*). Direction is always relative to something else: this something else (as in, *I walk along*) is not always explicitly stated; but it may be overtly expressed (*I walk along the street*).

Some events include not only the doer and the action, but the thing upon which the action is done (*I hit a ball*). This doer-action-receiver type of event may also possess direction of movement, either implicit in its expression (*I cannot hit a ball without hitting it somewhere*) or explicit (*I hit a ball along the street*). But here the direction has reference to the receiver of the action (*ball*) rather than to the doer (*I*, in *I walk along*). If we add to these concepts some qualifiers of the action (*I walk fast*), qualifiers of the doer or the receiver (*I hit a soft ball*), qualifiers of direction (*I walk straight along*), we are still in the realm in which we can quite easily relate grammatical categories and terms to actual situations.

We are able in English, then, to refer to actions, to doers and receivers of actions, to directions of movement, to qualifiers of all these concepts, and to many other cate-

gories of reference. Every language has some means of expressing these ideas, because the situations to which they refer are universal. But even at this simple level we can see how the traditional teaching of English grammar, with its rigid formal classifications and its deductive presentation, will fail to convey any sense of the relation between language patterns and reality. For example, we have seen that *along* in *I walk along* and *I walk along the street* could have the same directional force of meaning in both instances. Similarly, *Walk up* may be equivalent to *Walk up the stairs*. In fact, the former style of sentence is often used in English as an elliptical or handy form of the latter. But the traditional formal grammar would classify one direction-word as an adverb and the other as a preposition. This is a classification based entirely upon syntactic form: *along* is an adverb because it is preceded by the verb *walk* and is not followed by other relevant words; in the second sentence it is a preposition because it is preposed to *the street*. This rigorously formal type of distinction ignores the meaningful function of words in helping to refer to the event described by a whole sentence.

A truly descriptive grammar begins where language itself begins: with the relations between men and things and actions in actual life. Operations by and upon entities (living or not) that are present to the senses are its root and authority. Thence its constructions and forms are carried over to describe metaphorically situations in which the elements are not present to the senses. We go, for example, quite naturally from *I hit the ball*, and *I walk up*, to *This idea strikes me*, and *I wake up*. The first sentences are literal, in the sense that they refer to physical objects and actions; the second, metaphorical, in the sense that they attribute physical motion, action, and direction to situations where these do not exist. We cannot be *struck*

by an idea in the physical sense in which a ball is *struck by a bat;* and we *wake up* without any physical elevation. The metaphorical sentences carry over from their literal counterparts their grammatical constructions. For example, *idea,* conceived metaphorically as the doer of an act, becomes the subject, and *me,* the object. Actually, in the event here talked about, if there is literally any doer, it is probably the person who has the idea. Similarly, the *up* in *I wake up* may be taken as a sort of direction word, a state of consciousness being conceived as a higher state than one of sleep. In failing to describe actual physical relationships and their analogous transferences in metaphor, formal grammar as now taught obscures the metaphorical implications of much of what we say, and stands between us and a clear grasp of the situations, events, feelings, and more or less complex constructs to which our words refer.

But even at the comparatively simple level of language and language categories which we have described, difficult questions may arise, and generalizations must be left open to further inquiry. As soon as we make of grammar the science of description of the living language as applied to living situations, and cease to think of it as a set of rules arbitrarily imposed from without upon language and experience, we are faced with all the uncertainties that beset the scientist in this or any other field. Some of our neatest and most cherished generalizations break down. It would be satisfying, from the teacher's point of view, if the relationship between experience and grammatical construction which, as we have indicated, sometimes exists, invariably existed, so that there would be a logical necessity imposed upon the construction of language by the outside world. But this is not true even at the simple level from which our illustrations have been chosen. Every event does not have a doer (*It is raining*). The formal subject of an active

verb, which in English ordinarily refers to the doer, may in reality have reference to the thing acted upon, to the receiver of the action (*The* branches *of a tree sway, and the* tree *falls in the hurricane*). In some contexts, words that are generally terms of direction may not only lose their directional force (*He backed* up *his car downhill*), but may be entirely devoid of any reference to motion (*He locked* up *his house*).

Again, it would be comforting to the teacher of English if the expression of every complete thought required a verb and a subject. The "rule" that "a sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought," when put to the test, appears to be not a rule at all but a definition. We can call such a group of words a "sentence" if we like; and we can make a "rule" for our students that they must make complete sense by writing in sentences. But this would be a "rule" in the sense of regulation that they must follow if they are to please us; not a "rule" in the sense of an inevitable way in which language has been observed to work. The last part of Galsworthy's "The Apple-Tree" will illustrate the point: [1]

"But there's something wanting, isn't there?" Ashurst nodded. Wanting? The apple tree, the singing, and the gold!

We can, of course, take insecure refuge here in the argument that the verb is understood in the last "sentence," carried over from the question, and giving us the sense: "The apple tree, the singing, and the gold are wanting." But by the addition of the verb here we actually succeed in saying less, not more. By omission of his verb Galsworthy has said, at least, "The apple tree, the singing, and the gold are wanting, have long been wanting, and always

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[1] John Galsworthy, *Five Tales* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), "The Apple-Tree," p. 278.

will be wanting." That is perhaps what Galsworthy would have written had he been taught a profound and unquestioning respect for "rules."

Conversely, it is by no means inevitable that words put into the verb-subject form of a sentence will make complete sense, or have any meaning at all. (*This square table is round.*) [1]

Perhaps this brief analysis of some of the basic grammatical constructions and concepts will serve to illustrate our attitude toward grammar and toward its teaching. It is our suggestion that the teaching of grammar become empirical, or inductive, in two senses: first, that the teacher, or teachers, determine over a period of time by an inductive and experimental method what grammar can profitably be taught; second, that the teaching itself be undertaken inductively; that is, that students work from printed and oral discourse to generalizations, principles, and categories, rather than from generalizations, principles, and categories to discourse viewed simply as exemplifications of principles or categories, or to writing undertaken merely as their application. Let us go on to elaborate this suggestion.

It is our belief that teachers should put to the test of their own classroom experience the grammar they teach; in other words, that they should examine the linguistic needs (*urges,* or in this case more especially *lacks*) of their students, study the probable bearing of the specific and detailed elements and concepts of grammar upon these needs; teach those elements and concepts that promise to meet the needs; and, after sufficient time, see whether the teaching of grammar has met any or all of these needs. There is room here for the kind of scientific research that

[1] See I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching,* Chapter XVII, especially p. 291.

the physicist carries on in his laboratory, and the method pursued would be the same. It would be the empirical, inductive method: collecting and recording facts from students' written and oral English, and from their reading; drawing generalizations from these as to their needs; setting up hypotheses about how these needs might be met through the teaching of grammar; testing the hypotheses.

As a rough sort of guide, we can suggest possible methods of approach. The student's needs might be competently analyzed under the following headings:

1. To express meanings
2. To understand meanings
3. To use language to develop his own thoughts and to organize his thinking
4. To avoid the kind of speech or writing which might in certain situations brand him as illiterate.

It is possible that some of the traditional practices in teaching formal grammar contribute to some of these purposes. For example, drill in the cases of pronouns, and in the rule that prepositions are followed by the objective case, might help the student avoid the stigma of illiteracy which some people might place upon him were he to say, "If it had been us. . . ." In such instances, however, there are still two questions for the scientifically minded teacher to ask himself. First, could the same result be equally well achieved in less time by other means, as for example by group or individual oral (and hence auditory) practice? Second, is the particular "grammatical error" under process of eradication really, in practice, an error at all? A living language is primarily oral. "Correctness" in grammar must be judged by spoken practice, not merely by formal rules derived from literary texts. Oral language can rely upon gesture, facial expression, and voice modulations to help in the communication of total meanings. About the

best that can be hoped for in the written language is that it will somehow be able to supply the deficiencies in communication which are caused by the absence of physical setting, gesture, facial expression, and tone and tempo of voice. In its written form it appears to be more static, and "stays put" long enough for grammatical analysis and classification. "Rules" seem then to emerge. Whether it is logical or desirable to apply all these "rules" originally, even if indirectly, derived from observation of oral language in the first place, as *demands* upon current spoken or even written language, is a question which must always be before the teacher's mind.

It is our belief not only that the approach to grammar on the part of the teacher should be inductive, but also that the approach on the part of the student should be empirical; that a study of grammar should proceed not from rule or category to illustration or practice, but from the facts of language to the generalizations. There is no good reason why a class cannot be taught what grammar it appears to need, by making from its own observations of spoken and written language its own formal categories and its own analysis of the work language does and of the ways language does this work. This does not mean that every student would be free to invent his own "grammar." Such a philosophy would imply that English has no grammar at all. The work at all points should be guided by a teacher who knows English grammar thoroughly, and who sees its relationships to the student's experience and to the grammar of other languages the student may have studied.

Such an approach would almost of necessity be a functional approach. The word *functional* as applied to grammar and to the teaching of grammar has had a diversity of meanings, none of them well defined. Three fairly distinct ones are traceable in current writings on the subject. Some

teachers, when they have said that they are teaching "functional" grammar, have meant simply that they are teaching rules that have been found to be applicable by students, grammar that seems to "function" in the work of the classroom, or to produce desirable results in the speech or writings of their students.

Thus, under this meaning of the term, a student studying the forms of the relative pronoun and the rule that a preposition must be followed by the objective case would be learning two grammatical elements whose relatedness can be demonstrated by a "functional" application in some specific verbal example. The student would be able to "functionalize" these two elements in practice by saying, "The boy to *whom* I gave the chalk is now at the blackboard." Even though this type of study is concerned with the formal elements of grammar, it is held to "function" in use.

Another meaning of *functional grammar,* as the term is used today, seems to be a study of the *function* of words in sentences. Usually this is little more than what was once called the study of "constructions." This results in little more than a substitution of a more cumbrous but no more truly descriptive terminology for the older formal categories. The categories remain in essence the same, but go under brighter and longer names.

There is still a third sense of the word *functional* as applied to grammar; a sense which is seldom intended, or even implied, in current talk about functional grammar, but which seems to us to be the true sense, at least the most fruitful sense. When we teach functional grammar in this third sense, we mean that we are teaching such formal grammar as seems to reflect more directly the realities which it is the business of language to express; and in this same process are also giving attention to the fact that no

category invariably does this; that some of our present categories, in fact, rarely do. The illustrations we have given of acts and doers of acts illustrate this meaning of *functional.*

Such a study as we have indicated would be "functional" in the more superficial sense of applicable and useful. It would confine itself to a study of what words really do and can be made to do, and would automatically exclude barren classifications which have no pertinence to the English language. It would be functional in the third and true sense, also, since attention would constantly be given to the meanings being expressed, and to a comparison between the factual situation and its verbal representation. Attention would be paid not to sorting words or longer sentence elements into predetermined categories, but to such questions as "What is the situation being described here? If the word order or constructions were changed in a certain way, how would the situation be changed? If the situation were changed, what verbal changes would have to be made to describe it?"

Such an approach to language would take away from it its hue and aspect of being a mystery to be accepted but hardly understood. Language would appear, at last, as simply one of man's methods for getting along with himself and with his neighbors in his physical and social environment. Such an exploration into language, moreover, could go as far as any teacher might care to take it. Nothing now cherished as essential by any teacher need be sacrificed. Let us examine, for instance, one way in which a concept of sentence elements might be built up. By examining many ordinary and comparatively easy and simple sentences—sentences in which no particular rhetorical effect is being attempted—a class might arrive at what may be taken as the normal English sentence order, as illustrated

by the example given in the Basic English list: "We will give simple rules to you now." [1] From such simple sentences, concepts of the main sentence elements might be built up. Starting from this standard order, sentences might be examined to see what effects can be achieved by varying orders, and when one order would better communicate the full situation than another. Going further, phrases could be seen as simply taking the place of single words. We have words for most of our needs—to express, that is, what we need to express frequently. In "That was a *memorable* day," the qualifier of *day* is a single word because the idea is an idea that needs frequent expression in ordinary life, the idea that something is easily remembered or ought to be remembered. But I may wish to say something not quite so usual about a day: "That was a day *of many surprises.*" If we needed this idea a little more often, we should probably have a word for it, like *surpriseful.* The phrase is simply taking the place of a word we lack. Just so, more complex situations may or may not be in such common use that we have or have not single words for them. If a situation is complex enough, and we have no single word, we may have to resort to another sentence (clause), which again will exhibit some of the structures of our basic model, to qualify the object we are talking about: "That was the day *when I made a balloon ascension hanging on to a broken guy-rope.*" The experience is not common enough to have come into use as a single word. In some languages, such an idea might be expressed by creation of one long compound word on the spot.

Equally complex situations, if they become frequent, soon have words attached to them in English, first perhaps as slang, which may later come into good usage if the need

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[1] The Basic English list is published in all the Psyche Miniatures and in certain other books on Basic. See bibliography, Section D, p. 218.

for them continues. So, *bail out*, in "He *bailed out* when the wing broke," refers to a set of actions fully as complicated as those described in making our balloon ascension, but a set of actions more frequently met with in aeronautics.

Such inductive practice in studying sentence elements and orders might prove to be helpful to the student in reading, especially in reading difficult and involved passages. It would, among other things, give him a sense of the expected English order which might prove useful to him in coping with more complicated patterns, all of which could be reduced in his own mind to a basic pattern with which he has had experience in dealing. Variations from this normal order, furthermore, could be examined to discover what effect is achieved by the order used.

Finally, such an attack in the teaching of grammar would be practice for the student in applying a laboratory method to language. This in itself should be an experience of value. It should accomplish the further desirable result of awakening interest in language and curiosity about it, and should make language appear to him as what it in reality is: not a closed system of rules, but an organic part of life, just as much open to investigation and experiment as biology or physics.

In his own language, the teacher of English has ready to his hand a body of laboratory material admirably suited to the development and practice of scientific method. It has the great advantage of needing no expensive laboratory equipment, and of covering a wide range of difficulty. Sixth- and seventh-graders can experiment and discover in language at one end of the scale; and at the other, linguistic scholars and psychologists are still engaged in fruitful research.

Such a study of grammar may at times follow for a while

a familiar trail. But where the present terminology is used it should be used with a new insight. It is well enough in Latin to call *amatur* a passive verb, because the verb itself carries the passive sign, but in English it is the *subject* that normally is passive. If a batter is hit by a pitched ball, in respect to the ball and the action the batter is passive: he stands there, passive, and is hit. A formally passive form of the verb, however, by no means always designates a passive subject: if a nail is bent, it is itself passive; but if a man is bent upon getting revenge, he is generally not passive. We make this statement about him only after we have observed some of his activity. Similarly, as we have shown, a formally active verb does not necessarily have as its subject the active element in the situation, and as its object the less active. The "subject" of a sentence seems to mean little more than "topic"—the thing principally talked about. We cannot generalize, however, even about this view of a "subject." In the sentence, "What wonders there are in the West!" the grammatical subject is *wonders;* but the "topic," or subject of the statement, is the West. Thus, whatever formal grammatical terms are used should be closely examined for their true meaning, and for the applicability of this meaning to all situations that may occur in the dealings of language with life.

Throughout this discussion we have emphasized the necessity of paying attention to meanings. This close attention to meanings seems to us to offer by far the most promising attack upon language and its teaching. The development and teaching of the techniques of interpretation seem to us to be the pressing concerns of both the English scholar and the teacher of English, the language.

We have seen, then, that the teaching of language has largely disappeared from the English class not because it is superfluous or unnecessary, but because present methods

are not producing desirable or even noticeable results. We cannot escape the conclusion that if language teaching could be effectively carried on, and if it were given a place in the English classroom commensurate with the importance of language itself in English studies and in general education, then the teaching of language would be one of the major concerns of the teacher of English.

If we have established the central position of language teaching in English studies, we may turn to an examination of the question raised earlier. We have seen that teachers in all subjects are to some extent involved in the teaching of language. What, in this coöperative effort, is the special province of the teacher of English? What are the methods best fitted to his purposes?

The teacher of English is especially well fitted and placed to teach the techniques of reading (interpretation) and writing. A knowledge of these techniques rests upon an intimate knowledge of language—a knowledge of what words are and how they work. The province of the teacher of English, then, is to help students acquire this knowledge, and as far as possible to help other teachers acquire it; for, however the administrative details may differ from school to school, formally or informally the teacher of English can become a sort of liaison officer between different subject-fields in matters that concern language. Gradually, a sound, applicable knowledge of how words work should be established throughout the whole teaching staff of the school—as much a part of any teacher's equipment as the multiplication table is at present, and as certain scientific and social concepts are coming to be.

IV

THE BASIS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING
IN ENGLISH

WE HAVE BEEN at some pains to criticize the present-day approach to the teaching of grammar and rhetoric. But we cannot condemn the philosophy of education once embodied in the teaching of grammar and rhetoric simply because in modern times we have badly applied these two studies to our teaching. We have seen, moreover, that language teaching must still be the vital concern of the teacher of English. The questions are, how can the legitimate purposes for which grammar and rhetoric are taught be clarified? How can these purposes be accomplished by teaching the English language through methods growing naturally out of the English language, and suited to it? One thing is clear: English teachers must have new techniques, based upon a new and fresh concept of grammar and rhetoric, a concept that will be firmly based upon a full recognition of the functions of language and their implications for the teacher, and that will be applicable in actual classroom procedure. Theory and practice must be harmonious, and both must be sound.

English is a language with form and structure; but the form and structure of English, beyond a certain elementary point, differ widely from the form and structure of Latin. The study of an Anglicized Latin grammar into which the English language may be forced cannot be considered a study of the English language. A knowledge of the structure of English is useful and valuable either in reading or

writing, but we believe that such knowledge can be gained not through a study of classical forms, but through the habit of complete interpretation of the meanings of the thing read acquired by practice in examining words in their context.

Grammar we conceive to be a study of the inter-operation of words and word groups in sentences. Grammar, in this large sense, takes its shape and growth from the function of language to order experience. A study of words, then, is simply a study of meanings; and grammar becomes no mere study of forms in a sentence, but a study of an inter-action of meanings within a sentence. As an example of the difference between a study of grammatical form (what has generally been called "formal grammar"), and a study of the grammar of meanings, let us examine two or three sentences:

This object is my right hand.
This man is a fool.
Democracy is government by consent.

Under the categorical rules of grammar these sentences can be easily disposed of, and they would be easily disposed of in a sixth or seventh grade concerned with "formal grammar." Each consists of a simple predicate, *is*, a simple subject, and a predicate nominative, or subject complement. In the first and third, the subject complements have adjective modifiers. There is no more to be said, as far as formal grammar is concerned. But if we consider grammar to be the interaction of words to form meanings, these sentences cannot be so lightly dismissed; and, moreover, only by an analysis of meanings can their really important and significant differences be brought out. For the important thing about them is that *is* is given in each an entirely different meaning by the rest of the sentence.

In the first, the *is* carries the meaning of identity, and is equivalent to "has identity with"; in the second, it classifies, and means "belongs to a general class of"; and in the third it has a limiting or defining sense, equivalent to "may be defined as," or "I pray you to take, for purposes of this discussion, as." The first two sentences are statements of different kinds; the third may be taken as a definition. These fundamental differences can be seen only in a grammatical analysis in the broad sense of grammar; they are not touched by the narrow concept of grammar as formal construction.

Or take:

What I have written, I have written.
I have written what I have written.
I have finally revised what I have written.

Judged by the standards of formal grammar, here again are similar sentences; the first two, in fact, are identical. But a wider grammar gives the first a meaning not present in the others. There is a finality in the last *have written* in the first sentence lacking in the corresponding verbs of the other two; and this in spite of the fact that the writing in the third sentence is said to be finally revised. Narrowly formal grammatical study will never get at the meaning carried here. Nor is it enough simply to say that these words get their power through their Biblical connotation. The connotation theory can be overworked. Words are not full of meanings because they are often quoted; it works the other way. Words are quoted because originally they were full of meanings. Frequent quotation, in fact, is likely to dull their sharp edges.

Similarly, in the sentences, "This is a *square* book," and "This is a *good* book," formal grammar does not differentiate between *square* and *good*. They are both adjectives

qualifying or modifying *book*. This is true as far as it goes, but in leaving the matter here formal grammar fails to lead the student on toward making vital distinctions. Having labeled them both "adjectives," he is too likely to believe that they both describe *book*, and in like manner "tell what kind of book it is." In terms of the actual situations conveyed by the words, however, in most settings *square* would describe the book, while *good* would indicate that the speaker attributes certain values to the book and consequently feels favorably disposed toward it. Formal grammar fails to differentiate between adjectives that describe intrinsic qualities and those that describe subjective effects. This distinction is often an important one to make, involving as it does the differentiation between a statement of fact and a statement of opinion, which we discuss later.

THREE THEORIES OF MEANING

Just as a word gets its grammatical construction, in English, from its relation to the total meaning of the sentence, so the word gets its full and precise meaning from its whole context. There are three chief theories employed by teachers as to how words in discourse get their meaning. They might be called the *good-usage* theory; the theory of *authority;* the *context* theory. Most teaching of English today is consciously or unconsciously based upon one or the other of the first two. This report is committed to the vital importance in the teaching of language of giving due weight to the third, or *context* theory of meaning.

The *good-usage* theory of meaning is that a word gets its meaning from usage in a narrow sense—that use by the "best writers" settles the definition or meaning of a word, or whatever other values, such as the emotional and connotative, we are to put upon it. If the best writers and

speakers, or the majority of writers and speakers, use a word X to mean A with the nuance B, then the word has the meaning AB; and if we wish to express the meaning AB, we use that word, X.

The *authority* theory is closely akin to the *usage* theory, and generally is fused with it. Briefly, it is that a word, as if by its own right, has a meaning attached to it. Just how this meaning becomes the possession of the word is not clear; it may be by centuries of usage; by derivations going back through time to a point where some mythical Adam, divinely inspired, attached names to everything for Eve and the rest of us to accept and learn. This theory tends to' regard the language as static and fixed; new meanings as achieved primarily through the coining of new words to denote new things (*telescope, automobile, jazz*).

This report is committed to the third theory—what we have called the *context* theory of meaning. This theory accepts the authenticity of *usage,* but of usage in a much broader sense; usage not as set by a few "accepted" authors, but usage as determined by the full experience of the race. Where, under the theory of *usage* in its narrow sense, X . can mean only AB, under the *context* theory X can have any meaning, including any *new* meaning, which the writer has reason to suppose will be put upon it by the reader in that particular context. *Context* here is taken, also, in its widest sense—the *context* of *words actually printed* with it; *the context of the situation;* and *the context of the experience* of author or reader evoked by the printed words. The meaning depends upon the *usage,* if by that word we understand a broad basis of experience held in common by a writer and a considerable number of his readers, or held, at least, so nearly in common that the readers will approximate in that context the meaning intended by the writer. A part of this experience may be—

and usually is—a knowledge of the common experiences crystallized in the dictionary definition of the word. But this definition gives only a clue, a starting point; or perhaps a more or less definite boundary of a wide field within which the meaning of the word lies, its exact position being determined by context. But it is by no means certain that the dictionary definition can even perform this limiting function, as, in the hands of a skillful writer, almost any word can be given "out-of-bounds" meanings *through context,* and, of course, in *metaphor,* with which we deal in a later section of this report.

MEANING AND THE CONTEXT THEORY

In the above summary of three theories of meaning, we have taken *meaning* in its full sense, as we do throughout this report. *Meanings,* or "fusion of meanings," perhaps would have been a more accurate expression. It is convenient for purpose of analysis to discuss different kinds of meanings as if they were independent of one another, and as if their combination within the word were independent of the rest of the discourse. At the outset, therefore, let us emphasize the fact that these different "meanings" are interdependent, so to speak, within the word; that is, for instance, that the literal *sense-meaning* of a word cannot be determined in any given context without consideration of the intent or feeling carried by the word. Nor can any of the meanings of the word (sense, intent, feeling or mood) be assigned without reference to the whole context.

At this point, we should once more turn to the proper uses of the dictionary, and emphasize once more what the dictionary cannot be expected to do. In the process of interpretation which we have touched upon, the dictionary

is left far behind. The dictionary lists the literal sense-meaning of the word, and some of the metaphorical sense-meanings which have got into common use. It indicates the present boundaries of the sense-meaning, and within that field drives in several fixed stakes, useful as guide-posts. But it does not exactly place in this field the sense-meaning of the word in any given passage; nor can it give any direct hint of the other kinds of meaning the word may convey—tone, mood, or intent. The common idea that it is the dictionary that "defines" a word, or that "gives" it its meaning; that the dictionary is the one and final authority as to what in any given instance the word is being used to say; that the matter of understanding and comprehension can be settled by reference to the dictionary, is a common error, and one that is directly or indirectly responsible for many blocks and imperfections in communication and for questionable practices in general education.

But how does a word, then, get its meaning? How do we know, when we use the simple verb *to dust*, for instance, whether we mean "to take dust off" or "to put dust on"? In the sentence, "She dusted the piano," it means one thing, and in "The bird dusted itself" exactly the opposite. We cannot go to the dictionary for the decision. We must go to our experience with pianos and housekeepers and birds. We cannot tell the meaning of even a simple verb like *dust,* apparently, without seeing it in use with other words, which all taken together refer to some situation.

If our example of *to dust* is authentic, it would appear that the situation itself must be one with some part of which at least we are familiar through some sort of experi-ence. For instance, if you told me that you saw a keeper dusting an elephant, I could not be sure whether he was giving him a dry disinfecting bath, or sprucing him up for a parade. My experience does not include the ways of keep-

ers with elephants. I should have to ask you just what he was doing; and you might reply: "Putting a powder on him." I have had experience with *putting* things *on other things;* so I can now understand. This illustration, simple as it is, gives us a clue to the part legitimately played by the dictionary. I strike a "word I don't know"; that is, a word which I have not used, or heard used, as referring to anything I have experienced. For instance: "This report will ignore *orthoepy.*" I cannot, as I might be able to do in other instances, get the meaning of *orthoepy* directly from the sentence; for my experience is such that I realize that there are a great many things ignored by this report: the patience of the reader, mental health, voice culture, type faces, all of which might be considered in the general subject of language. So I turn to the dictionary, and find "the art of pronouncing words correctly." The dictionary breaks the word up into elements that fall within my experience. The breaking-up is, and the experience, of course, may be, wholly verbal. That is, it is not necessary for me ever actually to have dusted anything to understand what is meant by the verb; and I can now be sure of the meaning of *orthoepy* without ever having practised the art.

But this is not to say that the dictionary "gives" *dust* and *orthoepy* their meanings. As we have pointed out, the meaning of the word is given by the whole situation which it, along with other words, is being used to describe. More properly, the "meaning" is given by experience, conditioned by the situation. For communication to take place, there must be a certain amount of experience common to writer and reader. It is in this common or overlapping experience that words get meanings in discourse. The fact that no two persons have any experience precisely identical makes full or perfect communication impossible, and creates the necessity for interpretation. In any discourse, then, the mean-

ing of a word depends upon its total incidence in the past experiences of writer and reader; and upon the situation in which it is being used. It is all of this that we have called *context;* but in using this word, it is important to bear in mind that it includes past experiences with which the word has been connected, and the present situation, which determines exactly what parts of these past experiences are pertinent to the present discourse. The narrow use of *context* as other words printed in the passage, the "verbal context," is simply the clue to the present situation.[1]

These points will perhaps become more clear as we go on, but let us illustrate them briefly before completing the analysis of *meaning.*

Let us examine the word *fool* in the following passages. (Readers will perhaps do well to check our interpretations by reference to the full texts upon which they are based.)

O *fool!* I shall go mad.[2]

My *fool* usurps my bed.[3]

And my poor *fool* is hang'd![4]

Poor, venomous *fool,*
Be angry and dispatch.[5]

In the first quotation, the context, an important part of which in this instance is the situation on the stage, gives to *fool* the meaning of "court jester." Lear is addressing his Fool, actually present. But still he might be calling his

[1] For a full discussion of this theory, the reader is referred to I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), pp. viii–ix, 48–51. In his analysis, Richards uses "context" to refer to the matrix of past experiences, and "setting" to refer to the present situation in which it is being used. In his full discussion, this is an important distinction.

[2] *King Lear,* Act II, Scene 4.

[3] *Ibid.,* Act IV, Scene 2.

[4] *Ibid.,* Act V, Scene 3.

[5] *Antony and Cleopatra,* Act V, Scene 2.

Fool (or Regan or anyone else on the stage) a dolt, a numb-
skull, a simpleton. What, at this moment, is Lear's attitude
toward his Fool, toward other people present, toward him-
self, toward the whole situation? What is his mood, his
frame of mind? During the scene in which Regan and
Goneril have vainly tried to reason with Lear's passion, the
Fool has stood a silent and frightened listener and on-
looker. As Lear's pride and anger toward his daughters
mount, he feels an increasing sense of helplessness, an in-
creasing realization of his own tragic situation. Here, where
he has looked to find love, comfort, and sympathy, he finds
cold logic, hardness of heart, ingratitude. Yet he will not
yield to any temptation toward self-pity. He is a king. He
turns to his daughters with a final, passionate outburst:

> You think I'll weep;
> No, I'll not weep:
> I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws
> Or ere I'll weep.

Then he turns from his daughters to his "boy," who is a
simpleton, an ineffectual, a crack-brained creature—but
one—perhaps Lear believes at the moment the only one—
to whom he can look for human kindness and sympathy.
He will confide no longer in his daughters. He will ask
them for no sympathy. Certainly he will not call them
stupid for not seeing how they are driving their father
toward madness; he will call them "unnatural hags," but
not "fools." It is to the frightened creature he turns: "O
fool! I shall go mad."

So, here the meaning of *fool* (the actual referent as well
as the other meanings) is a fusion composed of Lear's atti-
tude toward the person at the moment; his mood; the lit-
eral sense-meaning (jester). In turn, these meanings are

fixed and determined by the entire context—the context of words and situation, and the context of the experience of the reader, a part of which in this instance is his knowledge of the play to this point.

It is not necessary to enter into such a detailed analysis of the other passages. The same sort of process is involved, and in each the mood, intent, and attitudes conveyed by the word merge with its sense-meaning and determine its full meaning; and in each the full context must be considered. So, briefly, in the second example, *fool,* which refers to "husband," probably carries over something of the meaning of "court jester," something of the general meaning of "dolt" or "simpleton," something of the idea of "one whom I am (we are) outwitting." Here the attitude (Goneril's scorn toward her husband) is of vastly more importance than the literal sense-meaning, however; and in the full blend of meaning this *scorn* is a large element. If one paraphrase had to be given, "the man I scorn" would be closer than "man who has the qualities of a court-jester or simpleton." Goneril is simply "calling names," and the word serves more to describe her attitude toward Albany than to classify Albany.

In the third quotation *fool* refers to Cordelia. In Lear's words there is perhaps an echo of his memory of the court-jester, the fool, with some carry-over of his attitude toward him. But, briefly, here again the important part of the meaning of the word is not its literal sense-meaning, but its value as showing Lear's condition, and his feeling toward Cordelia. Here the feeling is one of pity. "Poor child" is closer than "dolt," "simpleton," or any dictionary synonym. Certainly the context sets an entirely different meaning from the one the phrase would have were one to turn in dismay to a person who has driven through a red light with: "You *poor fool!* You might have smashed us up."

In the fourth quotation, Cleopatra is talking to the asp. Here none of our former meanings will do. The whole situation, and all her words, give an ironic, paradoxical, almost philosophical cast to the word. The word *fool* in this setting reflects the busy, self-important anger of the asp. It is able to deal death, but, like Cleopatra, unable to escape it finally. Its small, temporary anger is contrasted to the deeper but less noticeable anguish of Cleopatra, as it strikes at her to harm her and win its freedom, freedom perhaps from immediate death, while unknowingly it gives her the only gift she desires, which too is freedom, but freedom from life. It is impossible to say that any one word alone in this passage carries all these meanings and overtones; but a sort of test can be made by substituting other words for *fool*, such as *idiot, simpleton, dolt, snake*.

We shall add, for analysis by the reader, but one more example: [1]

> I better brook the loss of brittle life
> Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;
> They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh:
> But thought's the slave of life, and life time's *fool;*
> And time, that takes survey of all the world
> Must have a stop.

FURTHER ANALYSIS OF MEANING

These examples perhaps sufficiently clarify a part of what in this report we mean by "context," illustrate certain other points we have made, and open the way for a more complete analysis of what, in this report, we take "meaning" to be.

As we have indicated, we take the "full meaning" to be a fusion of various elements. Some of these we may now enumerate as:

[1] *Henry IV*, Part I, Act V, Scene 4.

The literal or plain sense-meaning
The mood or feeling of the writer (or speaker)
The intent of the writer (or speaker)
The tone of the writer (or speaker)
The attitude of the writer (or speaker)
  toward his subject
  toward his reader (or listener)
  toward himself
  toward other people or other things.[1]

"Meaning" in this analysis, it should be apparent, has a much wider use than that which might be called "definition," or "literal meaning," or "denotation." In this report, we take the meaning of a word to be *whatever that word can be made to convey to the reader or listener.* The above analysis cannot be considered complete, but is simply indicative of the kinds of meaning a word may have.

The relative importance of these (and other) elements within any passage will of course vary tremendously. In scientific prose, for instance, the first (literal sense-meaning, or denotation), will probably rank high. In some types of poetry the second is of relatively high importance. In other passages, the last would be of greater importance; and in still others it would be difficult to assign any relative places on a scale of importance. But two facts should be clearly borne in mind. First, in *all* discourse *all* of these elements are present; relative importance of one does not imply complete absence of others. Thus in scientific discourse, for instance, the writer has his mood, dispassionate and intellectual; his intent, to present facts; his tone and attitude of seriousness. And in the most emotional of lyrics, there is a literal meaning, a plain sense. Second, *all* of these factors

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[1] Adapted from I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938); *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1936), *passim; Practical Criticism* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), pp. 179–188; and other works.

must be considered together, as a whole, inasmuch as they are interdependent, and a change, or mistaken interpretation, of one will involve a change, or mistaken interpretation, in the others. An obvious illustration is Mark Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar,* where a misconception of his tone, intent (purpose), and attitude toward Caesar, Brutus, and himself distorts also the sense-meaning of much of what he is saying. Or take, as another example, one which came up in a ninth-grade class, D. H. Lawrence's poem, "Twilight." [1]

> Darkness comes out of the earth
> And swallows dip into the pallor of the west;
> From the hay comes the clamour of children's mirth;
> Wanes the old palimpsest.
>
> The night-stock oozes scent,
> And a moon-blue moth goes flittering by:
> All that the worldly day has meant
> Wastes like a lie.
>
> The children have forsaken their play;
> A single star in a veil of light
> Glimmers: litter of day
> Is gone from sight.

Night-stock (stanza two) was at first interpreted by the class as meaning the barnyard stock shut in for the night; or night-prowling animals in general, particularly skunks. The words *night-stock* could certainly, in some contexts, have this denotation. But the line, so interpreted, has a quasi-humorous tone, and betrays a somewhat jocose attitude. Certainly there is nothing in it that would be in harmony with the feeling of serenity or quiet beauty which comes from the rest of the poem. Here, in other words, the denotation of the words is controlled by the other ele-

[1] From *Collected Poems* of D. H. Lawrence, Copyright 1929. By permission of The Viking Press, Inc., New York.

ments, which in this poem demand the denotation of *night-stock* as "a night-blossoming flower." In the same poem, similarly, the "litter of day" in the last stanza must be taken not as sardine tins and blown waste papers. Controlled by the mood, as well as by the literal meaning of the last line in stanza one, and of the last two in stanza two, the words must be metaphorical.

It may also be pointed out here that all of these elements of meaning are not necessarily conscious ones in the author's mind. A writer may, and often does, disclose more of his attitudes than he may wish to do. Nor are all of these elements necessarily intended by the writer to be fully understood by the reader (or listener). The skill of Antony's oration lies in his ability to conceal from his hearers his *real* intent. Advertising and political speech-making abound in illustrations of the same point.

Multiple meaning, on the other hand, is often conscious and legitimate. That is, a writer may use words not to convey one literal, fixed meaning, but rather to suggest many meanings. This is particularly true in highly metaphorical language, and in language that conveys the writer's feelings toward his subject rather than an exact scientific description of his subject. For much of its effect poetry, particularly, relies upon the multiple meanings that can be put upon the words. It is this quality of language, among other things, that makes it impossible to give for any poem a single paraphrase that will convey the full meaning of the original. The full meaning is, as it were, the combination of all legitimate paraphrases and expansions. This multiple meaning is not what is ordinarily called "ambiguity," and not a mere play on words. It is perhaps better illustrated by the example used and expanded by Richards[1] in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* Cleopatra's

[1] I. A. Richards, *op. cit.,* p. 64.

> Come thou mortal wretch,
> With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
> Of life at once untie. . . .[1]

than by Hamlet's

> A little more than kin, and less than kind.[2]

REFERENTIAL AND EMOTIVE LANGUAGE

Although, as we have pointed out, a word or passage probably never has "denotation," "mood," or other meanings alone, but always a fusion of these various kinds of meanings, still it is at times possible and profitable to make a distinction between language that is in the main referential and language that is in the main emotive; that is, language that is employed primarily to convey facts, or to talk about things neutrally, and language whose primary purpose (whether or not this purpose is intended to be hidden from the reader) is to express attitudes and emotions or to engender them in the reader. This large distinction is an important one to recognize today, particularly for the reason that it is involved in much of the reading (and listening) that a student will be called upon to do in school and in later life. It becomes the main problem of interpretation in advertisements, much political writing and speaking, and in all forms of discourse in which there is an element of propaganda. Current newspapers are a rich field of material, which can be easily graded on a scale of difficulty in detecting the emotive charge and purpose—from a blatant advertisement to skillful advertising, editorials, political speeches, in which a more subtle use of words carries a concealed emotive

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[1] *Antony and Cleopatra,* Act V, Scene 2.
[2] *Hamlet,* Act I, Scene 2.

charge. This question bears directly upon that of the distinction between a statement of fact and a statement of opinion, discussed below. It also involves the question of what the student may come to regard as a legitimate use of emotive language and what as an illegitimate use, a question of ethics that has direct significance in the social-science course, and can perhaps be best dealt with there.

There is sometimes an ambiguity in the use of such phrases as "the feeling of a passage" or "the attitude of a passage," which in certain instances it is well to recognize. For instance, textbooks and tests often put the question, "What is the mood or feeling of this passage?" A passage may convey a feeling in two distinct senses: it may indicate what the mood of the writer was, or was imagined as being, at the moment of writing; or it may induce a feeling on the part of the reader. Similarly, "to convey an attitude" may mean "to inform the reader of the writer's attitude," or "to create an attitude in the reader." It may be the intent of the writer to achieve both results simultaneously. That is, he may intend so to portray his own feeling that the reader will not only see what it is, but also to some extent actually share it. Or he may intend to let the reader know what his attitude is and at the same time hope to persuade the reader to adopt the same attitude. He may, of course, achieve one part of his purpose without the other. It may, on the other hand, be his purpose to accomplish only one of these ends. His real feelings and attitudes, moreover, need not necessarily be those that he is intending to create in the reader. Almost any combination is possible. A great poem may spring from a deep and genuine feeling, and may in both senses convey that feeling to a sympathetic reader. A political speech may burn with genuine indignation against a public abuse, and in both senses convey the attitude of the speaker to the listener. Or a writer or speaker may in-

tend to arouse feelings and attitudes that he himself does not have. These various possibilities are important to remember in literary criticism where the sincerity of the author is being questioned, or in general reading where the presence of propaganda is an issue.

The fact that, as we have mentioned, a writer may or may not be successful with any particular reader in his attempt to convey a feeling, in either sense, raises another question of interest to the teacher of English. We have stressed the fact that a word can have no meaning unless somehow it is a part of the reader's experience. In making this point, we have had in mind primarily the plain literal sense-meaning of the word. To a child that has never seen a farm the word means nothing, unless it can be explained in elements that lie within his experience. The question arises whether the same principle does not apply to the other meanings conveyed by words, particularly, to the feelings that language can convey. If this is so, as seems probable, it is pertinent to the teacher of English in his task of guiding the reading of students and in discussing their reading with them. Just as a book or poem or shorter passage of prose may be too difficult for a student when judged by its vocabulary or by the difficulty of the ideas it presents, so may the feeling intended to be conveyed be beyond his power to participate in, or even to understand, even though the words used be in themselves simple from the point of view of their sense-meaning. In Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet, "No worst, there is none," for instance, the lines [1]

> "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
> May who ne'er hung there."

[1] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* edited with notes by Robert Bridges. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1937).

contain no word not in Thorndike's [1] first eighty-five hundred; most of them are well within the first five thousand. Yet it is doubtful whether most adolescent readers could understand the feeling they are intended to convey, and do convey to many mature readers who have in some degree been in their own experience closer to the feeling of these lines and of the whole sonnet. This same point has further verification in a situation common enough with all of us as we gain more and more experience through life: we have all at times picked up a passage familiar to us in our adolescence, and found in it new meanings, shades and depths of feeling, the existence of which we did not suspect at an earlier age.

It should be stressed here that the emotive use of language is one of its great and legitimate powers. There is no intention here to discredit it, or to eliminate from language its emotive quality, even if this were possible, which fortunately it is not. Our point is, however, that it is generally helpful and sometimes essential in interpretation and communication for a reader to realize whether the language he is reading or using is in the main evocative or referential. We do not wish to disparage the evocative use any more than we wish to disparage the referential use. We simply suggest that it is a distinction that is often overlooked; and when it is overlooked, confusion and faulty interpretation occur.

Similarly, we do not wish to label poetry as purely evocative. Nothing could be more rashly and foolishly arbitrary and far afield. Poetry has sense-meaning, logic, close thinking, no less than the most exact expository prose. Cole-

[1] Edward L. Thorndike, *A Teacher's Word Book of the Twenty Thousand Words Found Most Frequently and Widely in General Reading for Children and Young People*, revised edition (New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932).

ridge,[1] who was later to write poems and criticism which have made him to student and teacher alike the incarnation of the Imagination in literature, writes, in a "tribute of recollection . . . and a deep sense of . . . [his] moral and intellectual obligations," of his early schoolmaster at Christ's Hospital, the Reverend James Bowyer, "I learned from him, that poetry, even that of the loftiest and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive causes."

VERBAL "FICTIONS" OR "ABSTRACTIONS"

Another aspect of language is closely connected with the foregoing; that is, what might be called a division of referential language into language that refers to things present in sensory experience, and what is variously termed language of "fictions," "generalizations," "abstractions," "constructs," or "intellections"—words that have no referents present in the sensory world.

A noun in its simplest use is merely a gesture—a pointing out. If you and I are walking along a path, and I suddenly see a skunk ahead of us, I can say, "Look out— there's a skunk," or simply "Skunk!"; or, I can grab your arm and point. Approximately the same meanings have been conveyed in each case, provided, of course, we both know that the animal is a "skunk," and provided we have somewhat the same feeling toward the animal itself. Here the thing to which the word refers is actually present to the senses; and the word is used simply as a pointer. In

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Complete Works,* Vol. III, *Biographia Literaria* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1884), Chapter I, pp. 149 and 147. See also Charles Lamb, "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," in *Essays of Elia.*

this situation, there is not much room for a lack of understanding, and communication is comparatively easy and complete.

Now we return from our walk, happily in such condition that our encounter with the skunk has left no traces, and a friend asks us what we have seen. You reply, "A skunk." Here the word still refers to a physical entity, but one no longer present to the senses. It is a sort of pointer still; that is, it identifies a particular object, or one from a class of objects. Although the object "pointed out" is no longer present to the senses, it is physically possible, if necessary, to introduce the object to the senses, or to point to a picture of it, or to describe it in physical terms—that is, in terms which refer to the senses. If a misunderstanding arises, one of these things, or all of them, could be done, and it would be a comparatively simple thing to make sure that you know what I mean if I name the animal seen "a skunk."

Much the same sort of analysis can be made of the verb, which may be considered in its simplest use merely as the *name* of an action or operation. The skunk *goes* (or *comes*). That is, he *moves* in relation to us. Or he *eats* or *stops;* the verb, at the most simple level, names his actions in relation to other things present to the senses. Similarly, prepositions and adverbs simply point to the *direction* of the action. He moves *along* the path, or stops *in* it, or takes food *into* his mouth. Adverbs and adjectives, again at their most simple level, show the qualities of the object or its movement.

If communication always could take place directly at the level of objects at some time present to the senses, it would not be an impossible task to arrive at a high degree of understanding; and the development and teaching of the techniques of communication would be a comparatively simple

task—although even here it would, and does, present grave difficulties. But man has long since passed the stage where he can say everything he needs to say merely by using words which refer directly to separate physical objects and their movements in relation to other separable physical objects—if, indeed, he ever was at that stage.

As a matter of fact, words rarely do refer to objects directly present to the senses at the moment of discourse. Our skunk himself, as soon as he is out of sight, is no longer *that skunk,* but simply *a* skunk—a member of a general class; hence, when our friend asks us what we have seen, we really say, "an unidentified member of the general class *skunk.*" So the noun has come to stand now for a whole class of things. Here, however, for purposes of this particular discourse, the differences between the members of the class were not important enough to cause any serious misunderstanding; that is, there is probably sufficient correspondence in our ideas as to exactly what we saw. It is clear, then, that nouns which can point to specific things can also stand for the whole class of which the thing is a member (except, of course, "proper" nouns, pointing to unique objects, like Hitler or The Bronx).

Words may go further and further from the level of an object present to the senses. Classifications may become more general. I might, for instance, when asked what I saw, have replied, "An animal." Suppose that you do not know what the word means. It is impossible for me to make the meaning clear to you simply by bringing into the room *one* animal, the skunk, for instance. You would at once get the idea that *animal* was just another word for *skunk.* It is physically impossible for me to bring in and point to all the animals in the world to clarify my meaning. I can point to a horse, a cow, a dog, whatever is handy, and say, "I mean all these." Or I can explain my meaning in words.

It is clear, however, that the noun *animal* is not the name of a thing which is, or was, or can be, present to the senses, in the same way in which the word *skunk* is. The word *animal* does not refer to a specific thing; but it is a shorthand, convenient way of referring to a set of ideas about certain things, and thus to the things that have similarities important to my purpose, and differences of no consequences to my purpose. If I say, for instance, that I like animals, I am concerned with certain features that dogs and horses have in common, not with the fact that one has a hoof and the other a paw.

From that point of simple generalization, we go through similar gradations until we reach words that do not refer in any way to objects, but to the effects and sensations caused by objects, such as *hardness,* or to feelings roused by objects or situations, such as *anger.* Many other names and words have no simple referents in the physical world; for example, *truth, rights, power, law, nature.* Each of these, as it becomes farther and farther removed from the simple and immediate physical world, refers to a vastly more and more complicated set of ideas and feelings, or to structures or features of highly complex situations, and hence is at once more open to misunderstanding or misinterpretation and more difficult to define once misunderstanding or misinterpretation has arisen.

We are in constant need of such words. Without them, and metaphor, language could not get above the level of dealing with things actually present in the physical world. The two categories that we wish to make here we believe to be logical, definable with reasonable accuracy, important in everyday discourse and hence in education, and practicable for the purposes of general education. They are simply, as we have indicated, first, the category of words that refer to physical entities; and second, the category of

words that do not refer to physical entities. Into the first class we put words to the referents of which we can conceivably point, or of which we can conceivably indicate an example by a single pointing gesture to a physical entity. Into the second we put words that cannot conceivably be expounded by a pointing gesture. Each of these categories might of course be further divided and subdivided; but for the ordinary purposes of secondary education these two categories are both significant and sufficient.

Perhaps here we should remind the reader that no word can safely be classified in these or any other categories simply as a single word out of context. The same combination of letters may in one context refer to a physical entity, and in another to a complex set of ideas which have no single physical referent. The word *state,* for example, may be used simply as a physical pointer. In "This state is a vast plain broken by one mountain range," the referent may be simply the physical state, no essential idea of which would be omitted if the *land* simply were pointed to. Here *state* would be put into the first category if nothing else were meant. But in the sentence, "This state has a law against lotteries," or, "This state will elect a new governor tomorrow," or, "This state went Republican in 1936," or, "A state has a right to develop and control the water power within its own borders," or "A state has no jurisdiction in federal taxation," the word would quite obviously go into the second category. These simple examples further illustrate a point already made: that words in the second category are more difficult to expound, and at the same time are more likely to need exposition. *State,* once in the second category, has no one clearly defined meaning applicable to all its uses in varying contexts. It is, moreover, as we have pointed out, generally of higher importance to expound *state* once it has moved over from a word that

simply points to an extent of land into the class of words that stand for complex ideas and situations.

It is, indeed, for the purpose of concentrating the student's attention upon the second kind of word that the distinction is made at all. A clear understanding of what this class of words is and a realization of the problems connected with their interpretation are of such importance that this Committee believes that the class should have a commonly applied and understood name. This Committee has, however, been at a loss to find exactly the right name to convey what is intended. Most of the words which might be applied, such as *abstract noun* and *generalization,* already have widely diverse meanings, which are not always made clear by their users, and which do not coincide with our description of our second category. A name, *table,* for instance, might legitimately be considered an abstract noun when it refers to the whole class, which is an abstraction from its individual members, rather than to an individual member. In our classification, however, as long as we can point to a table as an example of what we are talking about, we should put the word in class one as a physical entity. Furthermore, as the words *abstract noun* are generally used in textbooks today, the word *state* would not be called an abstract noun in any of its uses. Hence, the term *abstract noun,* as often used, does not coincide with our second category.

There are similar difficulties in the way of using the word *generality* or *generalization.* The use of these words would undoubtedly bring to some readers and hearers meanings which would not fit our second category. There is such confusion in the use of the terms *specific* and *general* that these words and their derivatives are difficult to control in communication. In the sentence "Blindness is an evil," for instance, some readers might classify *evil* as a

"general" word, and *blindness* as a specific word, as nam-
ing a specific example of evil. Both words, however, would
fall into our second category, since both refer not to physi-
cal entities to which we can point, but to a more compli-
cated set of ideas which have no physical referent.

The term *fiction* is sometimes applied to words in this
category. The use of this word to refer to what we mean
here has several decided advantages. In the first place,
there is historic authority for use of the word in this sense,
since we have in mind the whole class of "fictitious enti-
ties" called "fictions" by Bentham.[1] The word *fiction*,
moreover, is in current even if limited use to refer to this
kind of word. Ogden and Richards,[2] for example, use the
word *fiction* to mean this, and the ordinary term *legal fic-
tion* is a special kind of "fiction" in this same sense. The
use of this word *fiction* in this sense, moreover, has its ad-
vantages in education. It brings sharply to the attention of
a class, perhaps for the first time, the fact that words like
law, beauty, duty, justice, cowardice, defeat, or *triumph,*
are not names of things which have physical existence, but
are created by the human mind out of experiences with
complex situations. The use of the word *fiction* in this
sense is a powerful method of emphasizing at once the
unreality, in a physical sense, of the referents of these
words, and their complexity.

In the earlier versions of this report, to which reference
is made in the preface, the word *fiction* was used for these
reasons to describe the second category. It became clear,
however, that the use of this word was subject to dangers
that the Committee had not foreseen. The word carries
over from non-technical and non-linguistic uses too much

[1] C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (New York, Harcourt, Brace
and Co., 1932).

[2] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning,* fourth edition
revised (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), pp. 98–99.

the connotation "falsity." Readers of these earlier versions interpreted our references to "verbal fictions" as complete denials of existence of any sort to anything except physical objects and as caveats against using these words in any logical or even sensible discourse. When we spoke of *justice* as a "verbal fiction," for instance, we were believed by many readers to be denying that men can and do act justly toward each other, and to be upholding the thesis that no writer who uses the word can know what he means or indeed can have any meaning at all. As one careful and intelligent reader put it, "You cannot convince me that a state or a law has no existence; all I have to do to refute you is to go seventy miles an hour and be picked up by a very real State Trooper." Furthermore, reports from classrooms, incomplete and scattered as these were, indicated that students were having the same sort of difficulty. They could not recover their balance from the first shock of discovery of this difference between words like *rock* and words like *belief,* and merely by labeling the latter "fictions," were likely to develop ill-founded, though perhaps not deep-seated, attitudes of cynicism and materialism. Still other readers of earlier versions of the report, although understanding fully what we meant by "fiction," quite properly objected to this use of the word on the ground that it should be reserved intact for use in situations where "falsity" is an intended part of the meaning, as in "Non-intervention in Spain was a fiction."

Upon considering all these points, and after discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using this or that word and even examining the possibility of coining a word, the Committee decided to use, in this report, the word *abstraction* to cover words in the second category. Obviously, in its close relationship to "abstract noun" the word has disadvantages; but it should now be clear what meaning

we intend by it, and it avoids the serious dangers which have proved to beset the use of *fiction*. We have gone into detailed explanations partly for the benefit of readers of previous versions of the report, partly to make ourselves clear to readers who are familiar with the term *fiction* or will become familiar with it, in this narrow linguistic sense, partly to make clear to all readers the meaning we intend to be put upon a term of central importance to this entire report, and partly to indicate in a general way the steps by which a class may be led through discussion to an understanding of the difference between words that refer to physical entities and words that do not, and to an understanding of the word *abstraction* in this special sense as referring to words of the second class. It is our belief that in the study of language and in writing about language in textbooks and elsewhere this is a useful and important distinction to make, and hence that there is need of a commonly used and commonly understood word to mean what we shall mean hereafter by *abstraction*. Perhaps this word, or some word so defined and controlled, but even better fitted to the task, will eventually come into common use.

The clear understanding of abstractions, and the sure realization of when we are dealing with physical entities and when with abstractions, is essential to straight thinking and to reasonably complete communication.

The use of the term *abstraction* to cover this general field of non-entities should not be taken as a denial that the general concepts for which they stand are valid. To say, for instance, that *truth* is an abstraction is not to deny the validity or usefulness of the word *truth*, but simply to point to the complexity and diversity of human actions and thoughts and situations that are caught up in the term. To realize that we are not seeking a separate physical or other entity when we are seeking "the truth" is perhaps the

beginning of wisdom. This realization does not preclude the search; it directs it. Recognition of the word *force* as an abstraction, for instance, at once puts the young physicist on his guard against using it as if it referred to a physical entity which possesses separate existence, and should lead him to an analysis of what is happening in the situations in the description of which he is using the term. Inasmuch as society is so constituted as to need and use a vast and increasing number of abstractions, and inasmuch as our students will be called upon more and more in later life to deal intelligently with them, the analysis and comprehension of those words are more and more being recognized as an essential part of general education.

It is worse than useless to decry these abstractions or to try to get along without them, or to look upon them as so much meaningless noise. The advance of human knowledge would be stopped, and progress would come to an end, were we to try to do without them in our thinking and in our communication, and to use only words for which sensory referents could be found. Most of the process of scientific generalization would have to be discarded, and the teacher, historian, economist, and statesman would be unable to make progress into new territory. We could talk and think about only those things that we could see, hear, touch, smell, or taste.

But the very fact that these abstractions are indispensable in modern life puts upon the teacher the responsibility of providing the student with the techniques for their analysis. This analysis is not a simple matter, to be accomplished by following any rule or set of rules. We cannot give as the unfailing key, for instance, the instructions: "Find the things and actions to which these abstractions refer; find the referents in actual life and experience." In the instances in which this can be done, as for example, it

can be done with *horse race, height,* and other words that refer to situations the components of which are mainly physical, it is perhaps the starting point. But it is by no means always that this can be done; and it is important and often difficult to put the student on guard against believing that he is doing this when, in reality, he is doing something else, perhaps merely giving an illustration or an example of what meaning he puts for the moment upon the abstraction. As an illustration of this point, let us take, in the sentence "Unemployment is one of the major problems of the present administration," the abstraction *unemployment.* We can point to *A, B,* and *C* who are unemployed, and by an examination of their situation *illustrate* what we mean by *unemployment,* or make clear what kind of unemployment we mean. But we cannot call *A, B,* and *C* the *referents* of our word, nor is the sum total of all such unemployed *men* the referent. We are not saying that *unemployed men* are the problem, however strongly our feelings may be touched by the human aspect of the situation. Our problem is rather the causes and conditions which have thrown them out of work. If we could give every unemployed man in the country a house, fuel, food for a year, and an automobile, his unfortunate personal condition would be improved; *he* would no longer be a problem; but *unemployment* would remain a problem. The man is not the referent. Furthermore, even if it were logically sound to do so (as perhaps fortunately it is not), we could not, in our thinking about the problem, manipulate several million men. Whatever the humanitarian appeal may be, the economist or statesman must stick to his abstraction, and is justified in doing so.

In the analysis of these abstractions, *illustrations* then are useful, if we fully realize that they are the illustrations, and know what we are illustrating. Again, it is important

to realize that many of these abstractions today are used frequently in discourse (by no means always) primarily as emotive words: *Democracy, Capitalism, Socialism, Fascism, Communism,* are current examples. It is always useful, then, to determine the emotional charge of the abstraction in the particular context in which it appears.

As a preliminary step in the analysis of abstractions, a linguistic approach is necessary to see with what manner of word we are dealing, how far it is removed from actual realities, and hence what methods of analysis are applicable.

By far the most effective means for the analysis of abstractions is an examination of the whole body of knowledge and opinion which surrounds them, or a study of the material from which the abstraction is made. An abstraction is a sort of shorthand for a complex situation, or set of ideas. The analysis of the word is the process of finding out the elements of this situation. It will invariably involve a verbal expansion. In this verbal expansion, as in all interpretation, an effort should be made to reduce the language as far as possible to words that refer to things, actions, feelings—the realities with which we have had experience. Such an examination and study will vary tremendously with the word and its context. The illustration given earlier in this report from the *Declaration of Independence* would serve as a partial analysis of the legal fiction of "rights" in some of its uses. The study of the development of industry, in history classes, and the study of its conditions and development in modern times, would give the beginnings of an analysis of "unemployment." In science, the technique of analysis of abstractions could be tremendously advanced; for here students are working from actual observation of things to generalizations about things. They see the relation between things and words

working in the natural sequence—first observations of many things, then generalization. The analysis of words is simply this process in reverse: the generalization, then an examination of the facts which led to it and made it a necessary part of our verbal equipment.

In analysis of these words it is sometimes a useful device to ask oneself, "What would happen if this did not exist?" Or, "How would the situation differ if it did not exist?" For instance, by asking himself, "What would happen if *democracy* did not exist in this country?" or "How would the present situation differ if there were no unemployment?" a student might make a beginning of his analysis of *democracy* and *unemployment*. Another useful question, "What would have to be done to this to accomplish a certain result?" is suggested by Hogben: [1]

As soon as you ask yourself *what would have to be done* to increase, diminish or maintain at some fixed level the population of a community, you discover that you need to know a host of different things which would not occur to you, if you set yourself the more general question "how do populations grow?"

Similarly, the answering of the question "What would have to be done to establish *international justice?*" might put us on our way toward discovering what we mean by *international justice.* Or an English teacher might find out what he means by *grammar* by examining what he does when he teaches "grammar."

The following citations from the decisions of Justice Cardozo illustrate the importance to law of operational analysis of legal abstractions, and his methods of making such searching analysis.

[1] Lancelot T. Hogben, *Retreat from Reason* (New York, Random House, Inc., 1938), p. 76. (Italics in original.) Reprinted by courtesy of Random House, Inc.

In Snyder v. Massachusetts, 29- U.S. 97 (1934), on pages 114–115, Cardozo said:

A fertile source of perversion in constitutional theory is the tyranny of labels. Out of the vague precepts of the Fourteenth Amendment a court frames a rule which is general in form, though it has been wrought under the pressure of particular situations. Forthwith another situation is placed under the rule because it is fitted to the words, though related faintly, if at all, to the reasons that brought the rule into existence. A defendant in a criminal case must be present at a trial when evidence is offered, for the opportunity must be his to advise with his counsel [Citing case], and cross-examine his accusers. [Citing cases.] Let the words "evidence" and "trial" be extended but a little, and the privilege will apply to stages of the cause at which the function of counsel is mechanical or formal and at which a scene and not a witness is to deliver up its message. In such circumstances the solution of the problem is not to be found in dictionary definitions of evidence or trials. It is not to be found in judgments of the courts that at other times or in other circumstances the presence of a defendant is a postulate of justice.

In Baldwin v. G. A. F. Seelig, Inc., 294 U.S. 511 (1935), on pages 526–527, he was discussing the concept of "original package," which has done more than any other to confuse the law relating to interstate commerce. Cardozo said:

In brief, the test of the original package is not an ultimate principle. It is an illustration of a principle. [Citing case.] It marks a convenient boundary and one sufficiently precise save in exceptional conditions. What is ultimate is the principle that one state in its dealings with another may not place itself in a position of economic isolation. Formulas and catchwords are subordinate to this overmastering requirement.

In Concordia Fire Insurance Co. v. Illinois, 292 U.S. 535 (1934), on pages 550 and 551, he said:

The validity of a tax depends upon its nature, and not upon its name. . . . No descriptive epithet applied to the tax by the

Illinois court or any other can transform the essential nature of the tax into something other than it is.

In Mayflower Farms, Inc. v. Ten Eyck, 297 U.S. 266 (1936), on page 277, he said:

It is juggling with words to say that all the independents make up a single "class," and by reason of that fact must be subjected to a single rule. Whether the class is divisible into sub-classes is the very question to be answered.

In Interstate Commerce Commission v. New York, New Haven & Hartford R.R. Co., 287 U.S. 178 (1932), on page 192, he points out that to call the rights of one carrier to move its trains over the tracks of another "property" only confuses the issue as to whether it is the kind of property which the Interstate Commerce Commission must value for rate-making purposes.

In Norwegian Nitrogen Products Co. v. United States, 288 U.S. 294 (1933), at pages 317–318, the appellant was arguing that because a commission was by law required to hold a "hearing" all the incidents of a hearing before wholly different types of commissions must inhere in the hearing in question. Cardozo says:

Whatever the appropriate label, the kind of order that emerges from a hearing before a body with power to ordain is one that impinges upon legal rights in a very different way from the report of a commission which merely investigates and advises. The traditionary forms of hearing appropriate to the one body are unknown to the other.

In Palko v. Connecticut, 302 U.S. 319 (1937), on page 323 he says:

Is double jeopardy in such circumstances, if double jeopardy it must be called, a denial of due process forbidden . . . ? The tyranny of labels [Citing case], must not lead us to leap to a conclusion that a word which in one set of facts may stand for oppression or enormity is of like effect in every other.

In Coombes v. Getz, 285 U.S. 434 (1932), on pages 449–450, he says:

> The Supreme Court of California has said that the liability thus created is contractual [Citing case]; but only in a qualified sense, as the expression of a legal fiction, is the statement true, nor did the court that made it intend otherwise. . . . If we put aside deceptive labels, borrowed from the law of quasi-contracts, the tangle is unraveled. . . . In any event, this Court is not controlled by the label which the state court may affix to a liability growing out of a given state of facts. . . . As to this, its judgment is guided by realities and not by words.

The same idea is pointed out by François Geny: [1]

> The abuse consists, if I do not mistake, in envisaging ideal conceptions, provisional and purely subjective in their nature, as endowed with a permanent objective reality. And this false point of view, which, to my thinking, is a vestige of the absolute realism of the middle ages, ends in confining the entire system of positive law, *a priori*, within a limited number of logical categories, which are predetermined in essence, immovable in basis, governed by inflexible dogmas, and thus incapable of adapting themselves to the ever varied and changing exigencies of life.[2]

In fact, the English teacher must look mostly to other subjects for the material necessary for an analysis of the generalized concepts of modern life. He can, however, point out the fact that these notions exist in language, differentiate them from words that refer to physical entities, and indicate the technique for their analysis.

One further point must be remembered here. A word like *chair*, in its literal sense, has a fairly well limited ref-

[1] François Geny, *Méthode d'Interpretation et Sources en Droit Privé Positif*, second edition (Paris, E. Pichon and Durand Auzias, 1919), Vol. I, p. 129. Translated in Benjamin N. Cardozo, *The Nature of the Judicial Process* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1921), p. 47.

[2] Roscoe Pound talks about the same thing in an article called "Mechanical Jurisprudence," *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 8, December, 1908, pp. 605, 608, 610. Illustrations could be multiplied.

erent. "I see a *chair*" leaves no room for doubt about what general sort of object I am seeing. But it is not so with abstractions. In "I seek for *truth*," or "I believe in *democracy*," the words *truth* and *democracy* are subject to widely differing definitions and interpretations. Therefore, it is particularly when dealing with such words that the student must be on the alert for shifts in meaning; and in his writing, he must be careful to establish in some way his definition, and to maintain it through the whole context, as pointed out in detail elsewhere in this report.

The foregoing discussion has perhaps served to clarify and expand our concept of a study of language as a study of the interaction of words in context, and to point to the approach to grammar recommended in this report. At this point it should be emphasized that the form and content of a piece of writing are one and should be so taught and studied. The form of a sonnet, for instance, is as much a part of its full meaning as is the sense-meaning of its words. Wherever a study of form, or "forms," is undertaken, it should be treated as only one element of the whole, not as a separable element or as a sort of mold that may have existence by itself. Simply calling a Shakespearean sonnet a sonnet does not in the mind of the student make it one. Any piece of writing is, like a drama, composed of many dynamic elements, which, in superficial appearance only, are separate, or which it may be convenient as a sort of laboratory exercise to discuss as if they were separate. But as a drama is not text, or stage, or actors, or theater, or audience, but all these five and more beside, reacting and interacting in a living moment to make one full meaning, so in a written passage are the many elements of meaning interwoven and fused. By *form* here we mean all the elements that go into the structure or design of the whole passage of prose or poetry; rhythms, balance or antithesis

of parts; verse-structure, and all elements of prosody; particular position of words or phrases. These elements are more than mere framework for meaning; working in harmony with, or through, the other elements of meaning we have described, they in turn become an inseparable *part of the meaning*. It is an enlightening experience for a class to rewrite a passage of prose and poetry, keeping the same words, changing only their order, and to discover exactly what changes of the total effects of the original are brought about. These will be striking in almost any passage of prose or poetry, but the point is perhaps best illustrated in the beginning by choosing prose or poetry where the form, as well as the other elements, gives a feeling of completeness and satisfaction: most sonnets, for instance; or Emily Dickinson's [1] "This quiet Dust—" with its final "like these" binding the stanzas together with a finality of form and thought alike; or Housman's [2] "With rue my heart is laden—" with its conscious design and pattern.

Having examined the different kinds of meanings conveyed by words, having made a distinction between words that refer to physical objects and those that do not, and having discussed briefly the bearing of form upon meaning, we should here pause for a moment to reflect further upon the importance of the context; for it is the context, as we have defined it, that controls all these elements of language which we have been analyzing. This report of necessity holds to the view that a word is given all of its meanings by its whole context, not by its dictionary definition; that it is the context, not Webster, that defines a word. Thus not only does the study of the word in context become all-important, but it also becomes important in-

[1] Emily Dickinson, *The Single Hound*, LXXIV.
[2] A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, LIV.

directly to build up in the student's mind the realization that the full meaning of a passage cannot be arrived at by piecing together the dictionary definitions of the separate words, but only by considering the interaction of words within the given passage, the lights and shades that play between words in context.

We are aware that this view is contrary to that upon which most of the teaching and textbooks of today are consciously or unconsciously based. In textbooks on composition, for instance, forms are taught divorced from words, and words divorced from context. Students are admonished to use "specific" or "picturesque" verbs like *amble, totter, stagger,* in place of the "general" and "unpicturesque" verb *walk.* There is no warning that a word is not by itself a verb, nor by itself "specific" or "picturesque," but that it achieves these qualities only in the light of its context. Rather, the student is generally taught that the secret of "vivid," "picturesque" writing lies in choosing "vivid," "picturesque," "concrete" words. In many current texts, lists and charts of such words are given, with such statements as: "Concrete words are specific words which shut out every impression but one." It would be hard to make a statement more diametrically opposed to the view of language advanced in this report. It has already been shown that in different contexts the same word will give an entirely different "impression." But of vastly more importance is the fact that no word either by itself or in context "shuts out all impressions but one." Quite the contrary. It evokes countless "impressions," and the task of good reading is to exercise a control over the impressions evoked, a control made possible only by the complete context. Similarly, the task of good writing is to control, direct, and limit the impressions clinging to even the least emotional and evocative of words

(like *walk*) by a process of control and selection of their complete setting in context.

An exercise designed to show that in many, probably most, contexts, *walk* is both more "specific" and "picturesque" than the words given on the preferred lists of the textbooks has been found to be valuable. Such an exercise might be the giving of such lines as Byron's,[1]

> She walks in beauty, like the night,

with the instructions to "improve" the line by substituting for *walks* words from the "picturesque" list of the textbooks; or to examine the effect produced by switching the *walking, struts* and *frets* in:

> Life's but a *walking* shadow, a poor player
> That *struts* and *frets* his hour upon the stage. . . .[2]

Or lest we be accused of selecting the examples which have a similar and somewhat unusual emotional tone, let us take the words of an old song:

> Madam, will you walk, madam, will you talk,
> Madam, will you walk and talk with me?

The student following the doctrine and admonition of the textbooks and striving to be "specific" and "picturesque" by changing his "stock" verbs would achieve astonishing but enlightening results. "Madam, will you *waddle* (or *march, hurry, saunter, stagger, lurch, dodge, swagger, limp,* or *creep*) and *shout* (or *whisper, stammer, declare, maintain, intimate,* or *mutter*) with me?" The shift does not, as teachers sometimes suppose, make the passage more "specific" or "picturesque," but it can, according to the words selected, make the lines run the whole gamut of

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[1] Lord Byron, "She Walks in Beauty."
[2] *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene 5.

meanings from the ridiculous ("Madam, will you *creep* and *stammer* with me?") to the sentimental ("Madam, will you *saunter* and *whisper* with me?"). The possible combinations will include sheer nonsense ("Madam, will you *dodge* and *mutter* with me?"). It can hardly be maintained, then, that these words have in themselves as words out of context any quality of "specificness" or "picturesqueness," since in the above passage they are neither "specific" nor "picturesque," but simply grotesque. Have they then in themselves the quality of grotesqueness? Is *creep*, for instance, by itself ridiculous?

> Creep into thy narrow bed,
> Creep, and let no more be said!
> Vain thy onset! all stands fast.
> Thou thyself must break at last.[1]

Apparently not. It is the context that defines not only the sense-meaning of the word, but also its emotional charge, its tone, mood, intent, and even the "pictures" and "images" which it arouses in the mind of the reader. The spectacle of man moving like an insect is itself neither ridiculous nor tragic. It depends upon the whole situation.

Here, as always, we must remember that by *context* we mean both the past experiences of writer or reader, and the situation, or setting, of which the words form a part. A further illustration, if one is needed, is Beatrice's last speech in Shelley's *The Cenci*.[2] Here a simple, often repeated act, which in itself is plain and ordinary, and which is spoken of in simple, homely words, becomes by virtue of its setting beautiful and tragic.

> Give yourself no unnecessary pain,
> My dear Lord Cardinal. Here, mother, tie
> My girdle for me, and bind up this hair

[1] Matthew Arnold, "The Last Word."
[2] Percy B. Shelley, *The Cenci*, Act V, Scene 4.

> In any simple knot; aye, that does well.
> And yours I see is coming down. How often
> Have we done this for one another; now
> We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
> We are quite ready. Well—'tis very well.

Similarly, in his book *Greek Metaphor* W. Bedell Stanford [1] states:

> But unfortunately there are . . . many . . . who accept this excellent compilation [Liddell and Scott] of meanings as a work of ultimate authority in the interpretation of meanings, who, in other words, believe that a *lexicon gives the true meanings of words.* . . . It is a fallacy based on the prevalent error that the unit of language is the single word and not the sentence. . . . Even the *Thesaurus* must in the main interpret sentences by words and not, the true way, words by sentences.

He is writing of Greek. But with equal force his words apply for the native to English or to any language. Perhaps we have been led into our word-by-word error through our having learned to attack foreign inflected languages by word rather than by sentence, whence we have erroneously applied the theory and even the technique to our native language. I. A. Richards [2] gives perhaps the most complete and authoritative exposition of this theory.

SHIFTS IN MEANING

A corollary to the context theory, important in its implications for teaching, is that the same word may constantly shift its meaning within a given discourse. It is the task of an alert reader to detect and follow these shifts in meaning. Similarly, the writer must control his meanings and be wary and conscious of his shifts. This corollary

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[1] W. Bedell Stanford, *Greek Metaphor* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1936), p. 110. (Italics in original.)

[2] I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, Part III, "Logic"; and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Lecture III, "The Interinanimation of Words."

should have direct application in the classroom through exercises which require the student to follow shifts, and through emphasizing to the student the fact that his own meanings must always be kept clear in his writing. I. A. Richards [1] emphasizes the necessity of such training as follows:

> We follow these shifts [shifts in the meaning of comparatively simple words like *book*] without trouble because we are familiar with them. We are not yet so familiar with the shifts of the more heavily worked abstract words of reflection. It is the hope and the great opportunity for intellectual improvement that we may in time become equally familiar with them. That, I would say, is fundamentally the aim and the justification of advanced verbal education, a thing otherwise often hard to justify; and the best answer to the troublesome question "Why should we worry ourselves with it?" is that thereby we may better find out what we and others are thinking.

It would be an enlightening occupation for any class, for instance, to study the faultlessly logical steps by which, in his essay "A Liberal Education," Huxley [2] arrives at the astonishing conclusion that the workman whose family is starving in the midst of plenty should have had proved to him, in his youth, "once for all, that it is better for his own people, better for himself, better for future generations, that he should starve than steal." For Huxley, the dilemma of the workman was not a false one; the logical equation comes out just there, and Victorian England gave Huxley no reason to doubt his conclusion. So he accepted it and pronounced it, without troubling to notice that, in arriving at it he (and perhaps the workman?) had been betrayed by the word *law*, which in this essay occupies a central

[1] I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* pp. 74–75.
[2] Thomas H. Huxley, *Science and Education,* authorized edition (New York, D. Appleton and Co., 1896), "A Liberal Education; and Where to Find It," p. 89. (A lecture given in 1868.)

position, and runs its whole gamut of meanings. At first, in the phrase, "a law of nature," it can mean only an *observed uniformity* of how physical objects act; then it takes the meaning it generally has in such a phrase as "the law of the land"—a *set of regulations* laid down by authority that must be obeyed; then, in Huxley's phrase "the moral law," it is little more than a social code for maintaining the *status quo*. Stripped down, his argument in effect is: "Syllogism one, 'All laws should be obeyed; natural laws are laws; therefore the natural laws should be obeyed.' Syllogism two, 'The natural laws should be obeyed; the moral laws are natural laws; therefore the moral laws should be obeyed.' " In these syllogisms, as in the essay itself, the shift in the meaning of one word, as usual, is both aided and concealed by the shift or ambiguity of another. Here the accessory is *natural*. Is a "natural law" a "law of nature," or merely any kind of law that does not shock our sense of rightness and fitness? Here, it is, or tries to be, both.

The operation of this shift presents a typical pattern. The word has two (or more) meanings (or applications). These meanings overlap: that is, they have a certain element in common, an element common to every use of the word *law*. Each also has its unique elements. Here the element common to each "law" is the quality of getting itself obeyed. The unique elements are many; here, the important ones are the inevitability of a physical law; the apparently divine sanction of a "moral" law; the idea carried in the statute law that a good citizen will keep it. The common element gives the writer basis enough for using the word to cover all situations in which the common element exists. But, once used, the word brings with it all the meanings it has in every one of its special uses, and the "moral" law takes unto itself at once the inevitability of a physical law, and the demands made upon the good citizen

by the statute law. The pattern is the common one of incomplete analogy; but as it is latent within one single word (group of letters), it is not always easy to detect.

With Huxley, the shift was unintentional. The same technique can be used, however, with malice aforethought, and is one of the most subtle of the devices of the propagandist, who is, moreover, generally aided in concealing his shift by the high emotional charge of his words. The typical use of the word *dictator*, which has at various times in the history of America been applied to the President, offers an illustration of this use of words. There are various and widely separate degrees of dictatorship, so much so that at the extremes of the scale the word may be said to have different meanings. A dictator of ancient Rome, chosen by the people to serve in an emergency—as one or two cities chose dictators during the flood emergency of 1937—can hardly be said to be a dictator in the sense in which the word has been used to refer, for instance, to Hitler. The word in any of its uses has the common element of possession of unusual political power; but it does not, out of context, carry any fixed idea as to how such power was acquired (whether by consent of a majority of people or by other methods); by what methods it is retained (by military force or through popular vote); or how it is exercised. It is possible, then, to justify the use of the word to refer to any person who exercises unusual power. Hence, it has in the past been applied to various presidents. But, once so applied, it carries with it, emotionally charged as it is for Americans, all the meanings which apply to the despotic type of dictator of modern Europe. To call a president today a dictator is tantamount to calling him a *Hitler*, and the word is generally used in this setting to transfer to the person so labeled all the animosity felt by Americans toward Hitler. There is an important

advantage, however, that the use of the word *dictator* has over the use of *Hitler* in this biased sort of discourse. The use of the word *dictator*, through the element of meaning common to all its uses, seems to be justified, and the reader himself makes the associations with Hitler, and hence fails to criticize these associations; whereas if the word *Hitler* were used outright, there would be a good chance that the reader would pause to consider the *differences* between the American and the European "dictators." This, of course, is just what the propagandist wishes to avoid.

DEFINITION, STATEMENT, DESCRIPTION

Any discussion of the shifts of meaning, or the importance of context in meaning, leads naturally into definition, which is in essence simply one avenue of approach to the whole question. A complete understanding of definition, we believe, should gradually be built up in the mind of the student. This should perhaps begin with, or certainly at some time include, the ability to distinguish between:

1. A definition of a thing
2. A description of a thing
3. A statement of fact about a thing
4. A statement of opinion
    a. an unconfirmed theory
    b. a personal evaluation.

We might include as a fifth category a tautological statement. This list is not intended to be complete; nor are its categories mutually exclusive. A description of a thing, for instance, might be at one extreme a scientific description of its measurable and closely definable qualities. The botanical description of a flower might be such a description. This would consist of statements of facts about the

flower; and it might define it in the sense of placing it as an individual in the smallest recognized classification. A description of a flower might at the other extreme be in reality a description of the writer's feelings about it, and might of course include his statement of his personal opinion about it or evaluation of it. In any extended discourse about anything, moreover, definition and different kinds of description and of statement may be taking place together. The list here given, however, will serve well enough to indicate some of the main kinds of propositions which it is often useful to recognize and distinguish.

To quote again from I. A. Richards: [1]

The crucial point, the logicalizing step, comes when we distinguish between a definition and a statement, for with that we are attempting to isolate and fix for further use a single meaning for a word. This step is for language something as critical as the passage for matter from the fluid to the solid state—as many metaphors about "crystallizing" thought and so on point out.

Under the first of our four divisions would come a full study of the various ways in which a word becomes defined. Here again modern textbooks and practice are woefully inadequate, and for somewhat the same reason as the one that limits their usefulness in the study of grammar: they are more concerned with a formal definition of definition than they are with the teaching of a sensitivity to definition and its ways. Any typical textbook may ask the student to learn to apply the formula of stating: the term to be defined; the genus—the smallest that will contain the species; the differentia, what is true of that species and of that species alone. For example:

Man is the animal with the power of articulate speech and the capacity for abstract reasoning.

[1] I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching*, p. 258.

It may continue to criticize such definitions as Samuel John-son's famous:

Oats. A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.

without stressing the importance of the first question to be asked about the proposition—that is, whether or not it is a definition at all; whether, for example, Johnson's intent was to define oats or to describe Scotland. Such treatment might assume that, since it is in his dictionary, it must be a definition—presumably a bad definition. These exercises generally continue to turn the student to writing formal definitions of many controversial words in current use, all of them isolated, single words, and most of them verbal abstractions that need analysis and full exposition rather than mere formal and verbal definition.

Such a hasty and one-sided treatment of the intricate business of definition is likely to give the student the impression that the meaning of a word can be fixed by formal definition without regard to context. This approach to definition, likely to leave in the student's mind the idea that good definitions are formally fixed, and fixed by authority of the dictionary, encases the whole question in a formalism through which it can never break into real life. For one occasion in which we may use the formal kind of definition referred to in this passage (and it is occasionally useful in certain limited kinds of discourse), there will be a hundred where, whether we know it or not, we are in effect defining our terms for better or worse through context. Even when a writer sets down consciously a definition made as such, the definition he gives should depend upon the purpose for which it is made, and the person for whom it is made. He does not define a trout in the same way to a novice fishing companion as to a cook or waiter. It is

impossible, furthermore, as Bentham [1] pointed out, to define all terms *"per genus et differentiam,"* since many *"fictitious* entities" have no superior genus. "Meantime," he adds, "the class of words which are . . . incapable" of this type of definition, "are among those in . . . which the demand for exposition is the most imperious." *Right* and *power* are among his examples of words important for man to expound, yet incapable of formal definition, because they have no including genus.

It is the province of the English teacher to explore and develop the varying methods of definition and to teach their proper use and control. It will not always be easy to take even the first step, which is a realization of whether we are dealing with definition or statement. The student should be trained to be on the alert for definitions implied in context, for definitions made by examples, by eliminations, or by opposites. Above all it is important to rid the mind of teacher and student alike of the thought that definition is a simple matter which can be easily disposed of by dictionary or by formula. There is no dearth of material. In fact, definition is central to all study of literature. In the scene in *Macbeth*,[2] for instance, in which Malcolm falsely accuses himself to Macduff, Malcolm's final speech is a better definition of evil in high places than can be gleaned from Webster. Or Bacon's *Essays* running the full scale of shifts of meanings in "Of Truth," "Of Superstition," and so on, are materials ready to our hand. As Richards [3] points out, it is not necessarily a fault on the part of the writer to change his definition of a term mid-way in his discourse. This, of course, depends upon the circumstances. His intention may be to explore a subject in its

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[1] C. K. Ogden, *op. cit.,* pp. lxxvi–lxxvii, 84–85.
[2] *Macbeth,* Act IV, Scene 3.
[3] I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* pp. 10–11, 72.

different aspects; hence a shifting of meaning may contribute to his aim, or even be necessary for his purposes. But he should himself be aware of the shift and its purpose, and make the reader aware.

The second of our categories, "The description of a thing," will not present as much difficulty, except in passages where description merges into the other three classes of proposition; and here a thorough understanding of the other three will generally establish a realization and recognition of description. Here it is important to notice in some kinds of reading whether the description is a description of the qualities of the object (a *square* table, a *wooden* chair) or of our feelings about the object (a *beautiful* table, an *uncomfortable* chair).

The last two, *statement of fact* and *statement of opinion,* are of primary importance not only in English but in all subjects, and represent an area to which all subjects, particularly science and mathematics,[1] make the greatest contribution. A complete understanding of the differences between a statement of fact and a statement of opinion involves a knowledge of the systems of thinking upon which the different branches of learning rely for their canon of material. A study of these differences leads directly into the formal, logical type of proof in mathematics on one side, and into the "scientific method" on the other. Similarly, in English and history classes, materials have to be examined with a view toward understanding the means used in these subjects to establish what could be taken as fact. There is no ready-made answer to the question "When can a proposition reasonably be considered to present such a high degree of probability as to be considered,

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[1] For an admirably clear discussion of the bearing of mathematics upon language, the reader is referred to Harold Pascoe Fawcett, *The Nature of Proof, The Thirteenth Yearbook* of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (New York, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938).

for everyday purposes, fact?" Further to complicate the situation, statements of desires, wishes, and hopes masquerade as statements of fact. This report furnishes examples, but perhaps no more than most pedagogical literature. "Teachers must do this!" Is this a statement of fact, or a wan hope of the writer's, fortified by brave words?

In this testing of what is fact, what is opinion, and what is hope, and also in the expansion of verbal abstractions, the "operational" logic of modern science has a direct bearing upon language. "The attitude of the physicist," writes Bridgman [1] in *The Logic of Modern Physics*, "must . . . be one of pure empiricism. He recognizes no *a priori* principles which determine or limit the possibilities of new experience. Experience is determined only by experience." And, he continues,

It is evident that if we adopt this point of view toward concepts, namely that the proper definition of a concept is not in terms of its properties but in terms of actual operations, we need run no danger of having to revise our attitude toward nature. For if experience is always described in terms of experience, there must always be correspondence between experience and our description of it, and we need never be embarrassed, as we were in attempting to find in nature the prototype of Newton's absolute time. Furthermore, if we remember that the operations to which a physical concept [is] equivalent are actual physical operations, the concepts can be defined only in the range of actual experiment, and are undefined and meaningless in regions as yet untouched by experiment. It follows that strictly speaking we cannot make statements at all about regions as yet untouched, and that when we do make such statements, as we inevitably shall, we are making a conventionalized extrapolation, of the looseness of which we must be fully conscious, and the justification of which is in the experiment of the future. [2]

[1] P. W. Bridgman, *The Logic of Modern Physics* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1927), pp. 3, 6–7.

[2] By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

Similarly, the basis of all language, if it is to have meaning, must be operational; that is, it must be rooted in experience, and referred back when necessary to operations, either for purposes of clear definition, or for verification of conclusions which we have reached through our use of words.

This reference back to operations is the starting point of the exposition of any term. In the example "law," given above, for instance, one sure way of defining what different things we mean is to go back to operations. To call one "statute" and one "natural" simply glosses over the difficulty. But if a teacher will analyze with his class the *operations* for which that word stands, the terms become clear. Statute law can be clearly defined and understood in terms of ballot boxes, legislatures, and policemen; natural law, in terms of what happens in the physical universe.

Again, in the social studies and elsewhere, perhaps, there would be included an investigation of how, in modern society, we actually come to accept our opinions and beliefs.

It will at once be clear how in this, as in all aspects of language study, much more than mere words, simple verbalism, is required; how necessary is observation and experience in any verbal occupation which is to succeed in vitalizing and making realities of the words used.

In teaching all these four distinctions, as, in fact, in teaching all the aspects of language, the student's own writing, coming as it does from his own experience, is the richest field for teaching material.

METAPHOR

We have so far stressed the wide meanings that any word can have in different contexts. It cannot have escaped the reader that this tremendous scope of words, this ability of

words to acquire new meanings, comes about largely through metaphor. The importance of metaphor is well put by W. Bedell Stanford [1] in *Greek Metaphor*, already mentioned:

Metaphor is the vital principle in all living languages. It is the verbal expression of the process and products of the imagination with its powers of creative synthesis; it embodies in words what the faculties of Association of Ideas and Thinking by Analogy produce in thoughts. So just as the Imagination is the dynamic force which creates thoughts beyond the static fixity of facts and analyses, so only metaphor can create *meanings* beyond the powers of expression of normal and technical terms which are (as far as can be) fixed and static. Metaphor is thus the dynamic, synthetic and creative force in language.

In the course of his full discussion of metaphor in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Richards [2] writes:

. . . Our pretence to do without metaphor is never more than a bluff waiting to be called. But if that is a truth, it is easier to utter than to accept with its consequences or to remember.

Certainly one of the consequences of acceptance of this truth is, for the teacher, constant attention to the interpretation of metaphor. It is not impossible, in fact, that a study of metaphor and its interpretation should occupy a central place in the English curriculum. Such a study of metaphor can go deep into language, into new meanings, and into thinking. It would involve a recognition of the dangers of a bad metaphor as well as the power of a good one.

As we have pointed out above in our reference to the present condition of the study of rhetoric, this vast subject is quite inadequately dealt with today. In a typical text-

[1] W. Bedell Stanford, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
[2] I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, pp. 92–93.

book on rhetoric, which may run to several hundred pages, such a reference as the following paragraph is likely to be the only one made to metaphor:

Figures of speech may be classed as poetic ornament. The commonest kinds are as follows:

(a) A simile is a comparison which uses the words *like* or *as*. EXAMPLES: A bird like a blossom atilt in the leaves. His eyes were as black as night.

(b) A metaphor is a comparison without the use of *like* or *as*. EXAMPLE: The road of life is steep.

Metaphor is variously taught, in both reading and writing, as an ornament to style, as a ruse that makes the "meaning" more "vivid" or "picturesque," or that "gives the mind of the reader pleasing images." There is little recognition of the fact that metaphor, far from being simply a clarifier or ornament attached to the sense, is the meaning itself. Nor is there any recognition of the fact that, in many subjects, there is no other way of saying anything than through metaphor. All talk about the mind, for instance, is wholly metaphorical. Most of our everyday discourse that is not confined to entities present to the senses can be carried on only through metaphor.

The fact that the teaching of metaphor today seems to be centered in the theory that it is an ornament to style may be due to the influence of the study of Latin literature, or, more likely, to an over-formalized study of English poetry. English teaching has not as yet completely rid itself of the doctrine that poetry is "figurative" and prose "literal." Consequently, when a student intends to write poetry he sometimes gets the impression that his first task is to hunt for "images" or "comparisons." In writing prose he also is likely to get the impression that metaphor is suitable for prose that borders on poetry, distinctly emotional prose and the like, but that there is also a language

proper to prose, hard-headed and direct, which "says what it means" and is "literal." He thinks he uses metaphor, in other words, only when he is trying to be "literary," and in his reading he is on the lookout only for the ornamental value of metaphor in poetry, is not sufficiently trained to see it at all in prose, and generally has no conception of the intricate meanings of metaphor in any writing or its importance in straight thinking and logic.

The first task of the teacher in dealing with metaphor, then, is to break down the idea that it is the concern solely of English poetry, and to establish the realization that it pervades all language. Failure to recognize metaphor as metaphor can be, and is, the source of much faulty communication and faulty thinking. Ability to recognize metaphor, and to deal with it successfully in reading, writing, speech, and thinking can be, and is, one of the most generally useful accomplishments that a study of language has to offer. Metaphor, like abstractions, cuts across the boundaries of subject fields, and its recognition and mastery is as vital to the straight thinking of the scientist as it is to the sensitiveness of the literary critic or the effectiveness of the poet. If the social scientist, for example, is to keep his verbal thinking straight, he must realize when he is using metaphor, and have the techniques for its analysis. Thus, when he talks of the "stresses, strains, and torsions" of "certain areas of society" he must know that he is using a metaphor taken over from the physical sciences, if he is to escape making mistakes in his conclusions. He must realize not only the similarities, but also the differences between the literal stresses, strains, and torsions, measurable and visible and to some extent predictable in the physics laboratory, and the phenomena which he is describing in these metaphorical terms. A stress upon a rod of iron, or on a plate of steel, can be detected and measured by instruments, and

by a skillful engineer can be prevented from becoming a strain or a torsion. A social scientist who knows something of the ways of metaphor will not unadvisedly make the statement that we must find those areas in the social structure where there is stress, so as to prevent their becoming areas of strain, and those areas where there is strain so as to prevent them from becoming torsions. He will use his metaphor to suggest to himself useful lines for investigation, questionings, and research. What, in society, are the evidences of stress, and what have we that corresponds to the physicists' instruments for detecting or measuring stress? The physicist can mark definitely the dividing line between stress and strain. How can the social scientist do the same? The physicist can foretell, perhaps prevent, and remedy. In social science, what corresponds to these operations? Perhaps in following out the clues given by his metaphor, the social scientist will be led to believe that the index of stress, strain, and torsion is the degree to which there is a failure to meet human needs, and thence into an analysis of human needs. The analysis of his metaphor opens up whole areas of purposeful and directed exploration, in the course of which he visualizes his problems in terms of realities—in operational terms. Without such knowledge in the ways of metaphor, he is too likely to take over into his thinking whatever would be true of stress, strain, and torsion in their literal field of science, with the unconscious and hence untested assumption that these things would also be true in social studies.

This simple example illustrates some of the important points to make clear to students about metaphor, what it is, its uses and abuses, some of the elements that go to make a metaphor "good," and methods of analysis or interpretation of metaphor.

A metaphor is a nexus of implied analogies. If this were

more generally known, perhaps metaphor would receive more of the attention it deserves; for analogy as a subject recognized by scientists and logicians, as a known weapon in argument, and as an established implement in expository prose, commands more respect than would a mere ornament to a poetical style, which is the rôle popularly attributed to metaphor. An analogy is an equation of relations. It takes the form, verbally, of a proportion in mathematics. A human being is to society as a cell is to the body; $A:B = X:Y$. This is the basic form of the analogy. It is not a metaphorical statement; it is a statement of one clearly defined fact or belief. The statement is about relationship, and is to the effect that these are the same. There is comparatively little doubt about what one thing is being said, however much there may be about its truth or validity. Hence, the issue of truth or untruth is clear-cut, and comparatively easy to manage. It is not likely to escape a careful reader or listener who has an interest in the issue.

With metaphor it is not so simple. We have called metaphor a nexus of implied analogies. By way of illustration let us examine our metaphor of the stress, strain, and torsion on society. The social scientist says, "Labor disputes were a stress on the social fabric. They culminated in the strain of the sit-down strikes, which were only narrowly prevented from becoming torsions." Some of the implied analogies here are: "Labor disputes are related to society as stresses are related to physical structures." "Unrelieved labor disputes are followed by danger as unrelieved stresses are followed by strains." "Labor disputes can be foretold (or prevented or controlled) by social scientists (or the government) as strains can be foretold (or prevented or controlled) by the physicist." The difficulty of testing the original metaphorical statement is tremendously complicated by the fact that we cannot tell just what is being said,

unless the writer or speaker himself expands his metaphor into explicit analogies, and this he rarely does. In fact, should he do so, metaphor would lose the effects it achieves by its compactness, and by its power of expansion in the mind of the reader.

The example we have given illustrates another important point about metaphor. A strain, to the civil engineer, is a danger signal, so the word comes to have for him, as for the general reader, a connotation of danger. It is an evocative word as well as a referential word. In using the word *strain* the social scientist is displaying a certain legitimate feeling toward his subject, which the reader cannot avoid sharing. The emotive element of meaning is present in most metaphor, in other words, as well as the somewhat elusive and manifold sense-meaning. Metaphor may rely upon any kind of similarity, or upon different kinds of similarities, and the metaphor based upon similarity of feeling is a common type. That is, metaphor may be based upon similarity of physical attributes, as in "That man is a beanstalk." This is perhaps the simplest form of metaphor. Or it may be based upon function, or action, as in "He is a pillar of society." "The day creeps on." Or, it may be based upon the feelings evoked, as in "A smiling sky." Frequently, it is based upon various types of similarity, as in the sentence "I am the last leaf on the tree." Here there is a combination of the two simple types already mentioned—the physical or pictorial, and the emotional. The sentence may mean: "I am the last one living of my generation of close friends and relatives, as is the last leaf on a tree. Similarly, I probably have not a long time left to live. I want the thought of me, moreover, to arouse in you the same *feelings* you have when you see one last leaf clinging to a tree in late fall." That the *feelings invoked* are an important part of the total meaning can easily be seen if we

substitute a metaphor that may have the same literal-sense interpretation, but a neutral or opposite feeling: "I am the last apple in the barrel"; or "I am the last turkey in the flock," or "I am the last bug on the bush."

The fact that metaphor can have a multiple and not rigidly defined sense-meaning, that it also can be highly evocative, that it is compact sometimes to the point of concealing its nature or even its presence from the consciousness of the user or reader, makes it at once a powerful and dangerous element of communication and of thinking.

What we have already said points to several elements that go to make up a "good" metaphor. To those usually listed in the textbooks under the general heading of "vivid imagery" we might add one or two others. A first question, however, would have to be "Good for what?" since the purposes served by metaphor are as many as the purposes served by all language, and include the purposes of informing, persuading, creating attitudes and feelings, of exploring—and, as realists, we must add, of misleading. Good metaphor, in general, is metaphor that expands and leads the mind of the reader in the intended direction. It will have feeling and tone in consonance with its setting. It will suggest to the mind profitable fields of exploration, whether the objects of the search be images, feelings, sense-meanings, logical relationships.

Metaphor and analogy are alike in one further respect: they are alike in what they are not. They are not methods of proof. Analogy, like metaphor, can be a useful means of opening up and suggesting profitable lines of research; but it can prove nothing. It can only direct the attention to this or that part of the world of experience. The proof must be empirical. The phrase "a false analogy" is misleading here. It implies that an analogy can somehow by itself be true. An analogy is true or false only if empirically sustained or

empirically not sustained. It is true or false in the sense in which we might call a searchlight true or false as it sweeps the sky in an attempt to pick up an airplane; it is "true" if it falls upon the plane, "false" if it does not.

For instance, the metaphor of "exercising the mind," and its implied analogies: "Exercise is to muscle as study is to the mind"; "Exercise of one sort strengthens muscle to perform work of another sort; so study of one sort strengthens the mind to perform work of another sort," did not prove the conclusion. That is, they did not make the conclusion logically compelling. The analogy did, however, suggest a profitable field of research; and experiments pointed to the fact that the conclusion was not true. The proof, or disproof, rests upon experience.

This discussion of metaphor perhaps indicates some of the techniques for its analysis and interpretation. The first step is generally to see what the vehicle of the metaphor is.[1]

We can go on to an analysis of this vehicle, and to see how many of its elements can be applied to the subject being talked about, and in what ways. We may note also the evocative power of the metaphor, which may be incidental, as in "a strain in society," or which may be a basic part of the vehicle, as in "a smiling sky." It may also be necessary for our purposes to check our steps with our experience with the world and our knowledge of it, as we saw in our examples of "a strain in the fabric of society," and "study exercises the mind."

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[1] A convenient terminology is badly needed in discussion of metaphor and in its teaching. We here adopt the terminology suggested by Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (pp. 96–103). In brief, he calls the literal referent the *vehicle*, and what is intended to be conveyed about the subject, the *tenor*. Thus, in our "last leaf on the tree" metaphor, the physical leaf on the tree is the *vehicle;* the age of the writer, his loss of friends, the feelings intended to be aroused, are all a part of the *tenor*.

One further point may be mentioned here. We have said that analogy takes the mathematical form $A:B = X:Y$. There is one difference, however. The mathematical form is made up of quasi-symbols that stand for wholly imaginary entities. They are therefore more free from empirical checking upon fact, and can be systematically manipulated to produce a series of equal relationships. Thus, from $A:B = X:Y$ we can derive $A:X = B:Y$. It does not follow that the same manipulations can be made with words. Thus, if lungs are related to man as gills are related to fishes, it does not follow that lungs are related to gills as man is related to fishes. In a recent verbal test at the college entrance level, the following item appeared in a section on analogy:

Bulldog: fox = tenacity: (slyness, freedom, sincerity, frankness).

The taker of the test is instructed to select the word that completes the analogy. *Slyness* is keyed as the expected answer. Here the mathematical manipulation was made from "bulldog is to tenacity as fox is to slyness," which is an indicated similarity between two relationships that can be seen in experience and stated. The bulldog has a reputation for tenacity (or is sometimes a symbol for tenacity), as the fox has a reputation for slyness (or is sometimes a symbol for slyness). But when the manipulation of terms is made, the analogy becomes meaningless; that is, it no longer represents relationships that can be seen to exist, or stated. What relationship have a bulldog and a fox that is also held by tenacity and slyness? This example perhaps illustrates the pitfalls which we dig for ourselves generally when we use words without thought of the meanings in real life for which they are intended to stand. It is a common failing of man. Doubtless a reader of this report can find many instances where we have done the same!

GENERALIZATIONS

A teacher will not go far in the close scrutiny of language which we have sketched without meeting the question of the generalization, or the general statement. There is much confusion in English textbooks, and in professional English articles, about these words and what they represent. There is, indeed, almost a conspiracy against them. Students are admonished to eschew the "general word" and to use "the specific word," without regard to what is trying to get itself said, as if this were a rule to be followed under all circumstances, and without, indeed, any clear explanation as to what is meant by "specific" or "general." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch,[1] for example, in his essay "On Jargon," writes that it is "a canon of rhetoric" to prefer "the concrete term to the abstract, the particular to the general." There is no warning that this may be so only in certain instances and for particular purposes; no hint that in certain other circumstances, the general might be preferable; no indication that the particular and the general are not absolutes, but that the same term may be particular in relation to one term and general in relation to another (as *quadruped* is particular to *animal* and general to *dog*); and, above all, that in almost any discourse that gets beyond a description or enumeration of physically discrete entities, the relatively particular and the relatively general will be in operation at once, in harmony rather than at enmity, in the words of the writer and in the mind of the reader. The ability to move easily and safely from the particular to the general and from the general to the particular, lying as it does at the source of clear thinking, at the root of both inductive and deductive logic, should

[1] Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), "Interlude: On Jargon," pp. 122–124.

be one of the major advantages to be gained through any competent study of language.

In this same essay Quiller-Couch, to support his contention, places side by side short passages from Burke's speech *On Conciliation with America,* and Lord Brougham's *Inquiry into the Policy of the European Powers.*[1] It would be worth our while at this point to examine these:

BURKE

"In large bodies the circulation of power must be less vigorous at the extremities. Nature has said it. The Turk cannot govern Ægypt and Arabia and Curdistan as he governs Thrace; nor has he the same dominion in Crimea and Algiers which he has in Brusa and Smyrna. Despotism itself is obliged to truck and huckster. The Sultan gets such obedience as he can. He governs with a loose rein, that he may govern at all; and the whole of the force and vigour of his authority in his centre is derived from a prudent relaxation in all his borders."

BROUGHAM

"In all the despotisms of the East, it has been observed that the further any part of the empire is removed from the capital, the more do its inhabitants enjoy some sort of rights and privileges: the more inefficacious is the power of the monarch; and the more feeble and easily decayed is the organization of the government."

"You perceive," continues the author, "that Brougham has transferred Burke's thought to his own page; but will you not also perceive how pitiably, by dissolving Burke's vivid particulars into smooth generalities, he has enervated its hold on the mind?"

[1] For this parallel Quiller-Couch credits E. J. Payne, "In one of his admirable prefaces to Burke. . . ." [E. J. Payne, editor, *Burke: Select Works,* new edition (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1892), Volume I, "Introduction," pp. xxxix.]

There is, of course, much truth in what is said about these two passages, as there is in general in what is said in the whole essay about the force of the particular as against the general. Burke, we may also note, picks his particulars with skill. Ægypt, Arabia, Curdistan, Algiers, Brusa, Smyrna, are names to conjure with, and it may be this as well as their quality of being particulars that here gives them their force. The relatively particular can doubtless be better chosen for its connotations than the relatively general.

Simply to call Burke's passage particular, and Brougham's general, however, is to miss an important point. Brougham's "pitiable dissolving" of Burke is hardly a rhetorical blunder; it is a necessary step in Burke's own argument. It is not, in fact, a "pitiable dissolving" at all, but a necessary forward step in the logic of the passages; it is a generalization from particulars, from which further particulars will later be deduced. This step Burke himself takes, as can be seen by anyone who cares to read Burke one line further. He continues: "This is the immutable condition, the eternal law, of extensive and detached empire." Conversely, Brougham, elsewhere in his essay, brings the generalization quoted here down to particular terms. Both authors, then, are examining particulars, and from them arriving at general statements, or "laws." They are simply following the inductive method of reasoning. Having thus arrived at their "laws," they apply them to the particular instance in question, following the deductive method of reasoning. Thus Burke goes on to argue that, this law being true, Great Britain cannot hope to make good as a despotic power in a country as remote as America.

Even within the limits of this passage from Burke, several other points are illustrated and are worth noticing. Burke's opening statement is general, more general than

any statement in the Brougham passage. He goes on into his most particular statements, those about the Turk. Immediately he makes a comparatively general statement, about despotism. Again he makes a comparatively particular statement, more general than that about the Turk, but more particular than that about despotism. Finally he makes the generalization toward which he has been working all the time, about "the immutable law of detached empire," which is in a sense a particularization of his opening sentence, but now established as a valid generalization from the rest of the passage. It is Burke's skill in using both the comparatively particular and the comparatively general that makes this remarkable as a short passage; underneath all the vividness remarked by Quiller-Couch there is a logic cold and sharp as steel, a logic that employs both the particular and the general.

There is still another point that will bear scrutiny here. It involves the relation of the particular to the general simply in the matter of a writer's making himself clear. As we go on to show, one function of a particular statement is to clarify a general statement. Here, however, there may be a reversal of this. How many of Burke's hearers could have placed on the map all the places he mentions—Curdistan and Brusa, for instance? Or how many of his modern readers can? Yet we can with assurance place them in groups in relation to their distance from Turkey. We can do this only by virtue of our understanding his first generalization. The generalization and the particular statement supplement each other; each makes the other more understandable to the reader. This is a further illustration, perhaps, of the folly of a declaration of bloody war between the concrete and the abstract, the particular and the general, the definite and the vague.

With this discussion and these examples in mind, we may now turn to an examination of some of the points that are likely to arise in the English classroom in connection with both reading and writing. It is certainly true that discourse that maintains a high and unbroken level of generalization is often difficult to understand and hence to check for the validity of its statements. Specific illustrations, or more particular statements, then, are useful in writing. There are three ways which should be noted in which more particular statements may be used. First, a particular statement may be used simply to make the meaning of the generalization clear. It is as if the author were saying, "This is the sort of thing I mean; this is the kind of particular that is intended to be included in this generalization." Second, the particular statement may be given as an example of all the specific instances from which the general statement has been derived. It is, in this use, as if the author were saying, "Here is one of the facts, of which I have more in my mind, upon which I am basing my general statement." Still a third use of particular statements may be to give *all* the particular data from which the author derives his general statement. This use, of course, is more rare, and might be more common in scientific works than in the general reading done by a student. These three uses are not mutually exclusive, nor are they always distinguishable. It is not always necessary, in fact, to distinguish between them, but usually becomes so only in instances in which it is important to weigh the validity of the general statement. The order sometimes gives a clue; a general statement following particular statements is likely to be derived from those particulars or from those and others like them, while a particular statement following a general statement is more likely to be simply a

clue to the meaning. There can be no rule here, however. In passing, it is worth noticing that we must be sure which of these three uses of the particular an author is drawing upon before accusing him of making a generalization from insufficient evidence of particulars.

In reading, particularly in reading language which is relatively general, this whole matter is of importance. A reader cannot be sure that he has understood the author's generalization until he can attach to it a particular. If the author has himself supplied the particular, that makes the task of reading so much the more simple, direct, and foolproof. It is this fact, perhaps, that is in the back of the minds of those who admonish students "to avoid generalities and to stick to the concrete." Authors, including students, who do not particularize their own generalities can make difficult reading. The reader may supply particular examples from his own experience even when the author suggests a few; in fact, any reader who is intent upon a complete understanding of what is written and upon arriving at his own opinion about its validity, must supply particulars from his own experience to sustain or refute the author. Here again, as we stress throughout this report, the basis of meaning is experience. Although a reader may add examples of his own to an author's particular illustrations, he must supply them if the author has given no particular statements to explain or substantiate his generalities. Reading becomes "difficult" in these terms, when the reader can attach no particulars to the author's generalities.

Some may raise the question here whether the reader can be said to have got the author's meaning if he attaches his own particulars, not the author's, to the general statement. This seems like a valid question until we remember that it presupposes the possibility of writer and reader having identical experience, which cannot be. If the reader can attach

particulars of his own that naturally lead to the same generalization, he has not been indulging in free and uncontrolled association, but in close and accurate reading. In fact, he has been getting at the author's meaning in the only possible way in which he can get at it. If a writer, for instance, makes the statement, "Fresh-water fish do not bite in a thunderstorm," we may say that we accurately have his meaning when we can attach to his words, out of our own experience, particular examples; for example, "The bass were biting that day last summer until the thunderstorm came up. Then they stopped." (Or "did not stop." Here we still understand, though we have reason to disagree.) The writer may not have had bass in mind at all. He may have been generalizing from yellow perch and sunfish.

We have gone into this question at some length partly in an attempt to clear up a current confusion, and partly because we believe that it has important implications for the teacher of every subject, particularly perhaps for the teacher of English, charged with the responsibility of teaching straight and clear writing, and competent reading.

Some of the points we have discussed will perhaps become clearer in our next and last section, in which we suggest ways in which this approach to language can be brought to bear in the classroom.

V

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS
AND METHODS

So FAR, this report has confined itself possibly too rigidly to theory and to destructive criticism. If our theories are correct, are they also fruitful? If much modern practice seems to miss the mark, can we as teachers put into our classrooms practice which, based upon sound theory, would achieve the ends that we have concluded to be desirable? It must be frankly admitted at the outset that the practical application of these theories is in an experimental and embryonic state. We can only make certain suggestions to indicate the lines upon which further experiment may be conducted. It seems to us that the revitalization of language study will depend upon the coöperation of a great number of teachers in English and other fields who, going upon the same principles and basic theories, explore different methods, develop new material, and pool their results. The textbook of the future may well be simply a series of graded exercises aimed at achieving the various results that we have indicated as desirable and other similar ones that may be added as experience accumulates. Such exercises should be previously tested in the classrooms of teachers committed to these doctrines, and might be accompanied by a teacher's manual consisting of sample answers given by students and commented upon by other teachers. One difficulty with present textbooks, particularly anthologies for close study, is that they have a tendency, through questions

asked about the passages, toward inculcation of the editor's ideas. The interpretation given to a passage by the editor is generally strongly suggested through the asking of pointed questions. It is far better to give the student a passage within his grasp and to ask general questions that will require him to give his own interpretation and leave him free to do so. We can here indicate only certain lines along which experiments have been made in a limited number of schools.

In general, it seems advisable, and from reports at present available from classrooms it appears to be practicable, to introduce into the English classroom at an early level many of the elements stressed in this report. The beginnings should be made informally, with as little use of special terminology as possible. The teaching method and the material itself, and the degree of completeness with which it is analyzed, should be graded according to the maturity and interest of the students, to their general experience, to their background in other subjects, and to the extent of their previous language study. In the early stages it has been found best to center the discussion upon only one new point at a time, with sufficient time allowed to insure that the student fully understands this point.

SHIFTS OF MEANING

Shifts of meaning, for instance, might be begun in a simple fashion, and at first, with a younger class, even made into a sort of game. The starting place would naturally be common words that have physical referents, like *book*. Members of a class may all have a copy of the same English book on their desks. A teacher can put to a vote the question "Have we all the same book or different books on these desks?" Opinion is usually about equally divided, and

argument can get hot until somebody discovers that everybody agrees about the actual facts, and that the debate is about different questions. The word "book" is easily disclosed as the shifty word that has caused the misunderstanding and argument.

Another simple example can follow to illustrate the shift in the meanings of verbs. The following two sentences can be given, both as true:

He has never made a basket in his life.
He made two baskets in the game yesterday.

Here the shift in *basket* is more easily seen than in *book*, since each *basket* refers actually to a different object, whereas each *book* refers to the same physical object. But the shift in this example is also present in the *made*. If we take *basket* in the first sentence to be "wicker container," we must take *make* to be "fabricate." In the second, we take *basket* to be "score in the game." *Make* cannot then be literally "fabricate." We do not manufacture anything except a hole by throwing a ball through an object. *Make*, then, must simply have the special sense of "adding something to the score." *Make* in both sentences has this root sense of adding something new to the existing stock, so the shift concerns the specialized senses of the word.

These shifts in meaning take place with all orders of words, from those that refer directly to entities in the physical world, to abstractions. In a sense, this is fortunate for the teacher, for he can establish the principles involved at a level easy to comprehend, by beginning, as we have suggested, with words that have physical referents. The importance of the full context soon becomes apparent. For instance, the sentence "The board was on the fence" may mean that there was a physical strip of wood nailed to material posts; or it may mean that a group of managers was

uncertain about what to do next. The meaning depends upon the whole situation, which would have to be given in words—that is, upon the context, which in this single sentence is insufficient to establish the meaning. Or, the meaning of either *board* or *fence* becomes clear if we are told the meaning of the other—the meaning of *board* depends upon the meaning of *on the fence,* and vice versa; and once we know either, we know both, and the total meaning. If by *board* we mean "plank," by *fence* we must mean the physical barrier. If by *on the fence* we mean "undecided," by *board* we must mean "group of managers." We have, of course, for the moment disregarded the possibility that a board of directors might be sitting along the top rail of a physical fence. In a class exercise this would have to be dealt with, and would raise the important question of the relation between language and experience. The only reason for this meaning of the sentence being a more remote possibility than the others is that governing bodies generally do not sit in undignified postures. But it might happen. Only the full context could tell.

This and similar sentences have been given to students, asking them to give as many meanings to each as they can. A class will begin with the two meanings we have given here; then it will warm up to the hunt and produce all sorts of possible meanings, such as: "The man who received the stolen goods had to hand out free meals." The question then naturally arises as to why they happened to get first the meanings they did get; and the simple answer emerges: "Because they are the most natural ones." A little investigation soon discloses the fact that the meanings are more "natural" because the situations to which they refer are more common, this discovery fortifying in a class the growing knowledge that words are connected with realities, and are not mere sounds. The next question arises: "How do

we tell what meaning the sentence has?" Here it becomes
evident that only the actual situation will tell. The class
may then go on to bring in similar sentences of their own,
or to take one such sentence and to build around it differ-
ent paragraphs, in each of which it has a different meaning.
This exercise can be extended so that the class uses the
same word, phrase, or sentence, in different paragraphs not
only with different sense-meanings, but with differing tones
or feelings, thus illustrating in their own writing at an easy
level the contextual control of different elements of mean-
ing.

Material for this and other work in language should be
taken as much as possible from reading or writing that the
class is already doing. An alert teacher will discover ample
material in the ordinary daily round, both in the English
classroom and elsewhere; for the factors we have stressed
pervade language. On a recent test at the college entrance
level, for example, the following item appeared: "This
book is made of paper, cloth, ink, thread, and glue. These
materials in these quantities have very little value. Conclu-
sion: this book has very little value." The student is sup-
posed to label the conclusion true, false, probably true,
probably false, or undetermined. The accepted answer is,
of course, "undetermined"; but the reason for the uncer-
tainty lies not only in the lack of information about the
particular *book* being described, but also in the meanings
of the words *book* and *value*. It is possible to pick up a
dilapidated copy of *Hamlet* for five cents at almost any
street-side book counter. But it would be impossible to
say that the book was valuable or not valuable. As a phys-
ical object it would have a low value as compared, say, with
the newest detective story or the current issue of *The New
Yorker*, for which we should have to pay more money. But
considered as a record of the author's thought, it would

possibly have more *value*—value in the sense of usefulness to men.

Or a class runs across the sentences: "His whole life was devoted to one *cause*. . . . His devotion ultimately proved to be the *cause* of his death." It needs no formal definitions of *cause* to point to the shift of meaning. In that context each word is implicitly defined, and the meaning is understood well enough perhaps without any conscious thought that the word has shifted its meaning. It is a "harmless" shift for two reasons. In the first place, the second *cause* is not used in a statement which, in that context, would be true only of the first *cause;* in other words, the shift has not caused faulty logic. In the second place, the second *cause* is perfectly well understood, and is not confused with the first; the shift has not caused ambiguity in the writing or misunderstanding on the part of the reader. In some contexts, of course, in fact in most contexts at the level of general education, it is not quite such a simple matter to come at the writer's contextually implied definitions. To use the word *cause* once more, what is a reader to do with the opening lines of one of Bridges' sonnets? [1]

> All earthly beauty hath one *cause* and proof.

Here *cause* may have either of the two meanings assigned in our previous example; and *proof* likewise may mean "incontrovertible evidence of its existence," or "way to demonstrate its strength." The whole sonnet must be interpreted before we can be sure what meaning is intended; and, even then, it is more than likely that something of both meanings clings to both words, that the poet purposely uses ambiguity. Similar passages are plentiful in a student's everyday reading at all levels.

[1] Robert Bridges, *The Growth of Love,* XXXV.

METAPHOR

A skillful teacher can lead naturally and by almost imperceptible steps from shifts in meaning of literal referential words into metaphor and abstractions. The ordinary language that a student uses and reads is so full of metaphor that there should be no difficulty in beginning to accustom the student to its ways at a comparatively early level, perhaps at the seventh grade, or earlier. Here, as in all work in metaphor, the attempt should be made to get him to see in metaphor one of the common and everyday uses of language, rather than a forced or poetic use for special occasions only. For metaphor, being one of the few ways we have in language of getting beyond direct reference to physical objects and actions, is constantly in use. It crops up in almost every sentence, whether we realize it consciously or not; in this sentence, in the sentence before this one, and in the sentence before that, and almost certainly in the sentences that follow.

As we have indicated, the interpretation of metaphor may begin with a recognition and analysis of the literal referent, and go on to an examination of its relation to what is being talked about. There are generally elements in the literal situation which can almost indisputably be applied, and which the writer intended the reader to apply, to the situation under discussion, and, similarly, elements which cannot be so applied. Between these there lie elements which the writer may or may not have intended to become a part of his meaning. The interpretation of metaphor generally resolves itself into an analysis of the vehicle into its elements, and the selection of certain of these and elimination of others in the construction of the tenor. This can be very simply illustrated at an early stage. Take, for instance, the sentence "That man is a fox," used

to describe a man who has just succeeded in closing a shrewd business deal. What does the class know about a fox? How does the fox strike our senses—that is, what is its complete physical description? What are its habits? What feelings does it arouse in us? Which of these characteristics does the writer intend to apply to the man? Obviously, not all. A good opening question to put to a class is, in fact, "What would be the fact of the situation if *all* the characteristics of the fox applied to the man?" What certainly can be applied? The sly, crafty habits of the fox. What can be eliminated? Such elements as his red, bushy tail. What elements are possibly debatable? Such as these: the fact that the fox is regarded as a thief; that, as vermin, he arouses feelings of antipathy; that he is not noted for his sociability.

In such simple exercises the full scope of the main types of metaphor can be shown, simply by a selection of sentences (in sufficient context) that illustrate the types in a comparatively pure state—that is, not compounded with other types. For instance, as an illustration of perhaps the simplest type, that of physical appearance, some such sentence as "The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls" would serve. From there a teacher might go on to "The first year's work is a foundation" (what the thing does); "A black look" (how the thing affects us), and so on. The class might go on from its own reading to find metaphors, and to continue this classification of their bases. In such simple ways as these a familiarity with the ways of metaphor can be built up. For the same method of analysis can be applied to the most intricate metaphor which a reader is called upon to understand; and there is no good reason why a student cannot be led by easy stages from "That boy is a beanstalk" to "It is not likely, however, that any scheme of planning under capitalism would make a forthright attack

on the heart of our problem which is the redistribution of national income. Without this the evils of under-consumption will persist." [1] Or, ". . . there can be no doubt that our reveries form the chief index to our funda-mental character. They are a reflection of our nature as modified by often hidden and forgotten experiences." [2]

A study of poetry at even a comparatively elementary level is almost certain to offer the teacher a natural oppor-tunity to discuss metaphor with the class. In a seventh-grade class, for instance, boys were finding poems that ap-pealed to them, and bringing them in to read to the class. One boy chose Kipling's "The Coastwise Lights," begin-ning:

Our brows are bound with spindrift and the wind is on our
    knees;
Our loins are battered 'neath us by the swinging, smoking seas.

This particular class had not previously studied metaphor, and the poem completely baffled them. In spite of its title, and the sense of all the rest of the poem, the first two lines persuaded most of the class that the poem was talking about men. Somebody with brows and knees and loins was talking about himself and his friends; it must have been a man. The remaining lines naturally became a complete enigma. When the reader finally disclosed the secret, that the poem was about a lighthouse, there was the usual clamor of protest. "If he meant lighthouse, why didn't he say *top* and *middle* and *base*. It was just a poet's trick of purposely throwing the reader off. Nobody who is honestly trying to say something ought to mention parts of the hu-

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[1] Norman Thomas, "The Essential Condition of Economic Planning," in *As I See It* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1932), p. 91.

[2] James Harvey Robinson, *The Mind in the Making* (New York, Harper and Bros., 1921), pp. 38–39.

man body unless he is talking about the human body. Let's get on to prose." It was a simple matter for the teacher to seem to agree, and to draw a mountain on the board to illustrate the reasonableness of the dictum of the class. "What was that part?" "The top." "And that?" "The middle." "And this?" *"The foot."* The class went on to see what other parts of the body were commonly used to talk about other things. The list is, of course, a long one. Then they went on to see what parts of the body can be referred to by words borrowed from outside the body. These turned out to be mostly slang, which is a form of metaphor in which a seventh-grade class is well versed, and in the study of which there is perhaps too great enthusiasm.

This simple exercise illustrates one thing that has generally been found to be true: once embarked on such a language study, from however lowly a base, a teacher can find, and does find, natural opportunities for discussing other features of language, and can lay the foundation for future more advanced work. In this discussion, for instance, the question arose as to whether *chest* and *arch of the foot* were originally body words transferred to a box and a building, or words that originally named objects transferred to parts of the body. *Trunk* was another word causing such difficulty, complicated by its even wider use: trunk of a man, my steamer trunk, trunk of an elephant, trunk of a tree, trunk line. Here they went to the Oxford Dictionary for evidence of earliest uses; but they themselves made the point that the dictionary did not determine the answer, but only recorded it. The determining factor was man's need for the word. He wanted to talk about his own hands before he talked about the hands of a clock; but apparently he wanted to talk about a seaman's chest before he needed to talk about his own. In fact, modern surgery has unfortu-

nately made him aware of many parts of his body which he once never knew he had. Surgeons can invent new names for new discoveries, like *capillary, pituitary,* or *duodenum;* or borrow old ones, like *appendix,* or *fallen arch.*

This simple discussion was followed by a simple classification of metaphors into types, in accordance with the following exercise, all of the material of which came out of previous class discussions. The phrases were selected from the students' own list.

A. In the following list, each of the first words refers to a part of the human body, and the second to something outside the body in connection with which the body-word is used. Write a few sentences for each pair, explaining what similarity makes it possible to use the body-word to refer to the thing outside the body. The first one is done for you as an example.

> 1. *Waist*   Waist of a boat

> Example of possible answer: The waist of a boat is similar to the waist of the body because of its *position.* Both are in the middle. The waist of a boat is the middle part of the boat.

> 2. Jaw   Jaws of a trap
> 3. Foot   Foot of a stocking
> 4. Knee   Knee of a boat frame
> 5. Neck   Neck of a bottle
> 6. Head   Head of lettuce
> 7. Head   Head of a gang
> 8. Teeth   Teeth of a comb
> 9. Teeth   Teeth of the wind
> 10. Skin   Skin of the earth
> 11. Body   Body of a car
> 12. Leg   Leg of a course of a sailing race
> 13. Leg   Leg of a table
> 14. Shoulder   Shoulder of a road
> 15. Heart   Heart of a head of lettuce
> 16. Heart   Heart of the difficulty

B. In the following list, the process is reversed, things outside the body being applied to things in the body. Do the same thing: write a few sentences for each, explaining the similarity.

1. Flipper	Hand
2. Hook	Hand
3. Paw	Hand
4. Pickers and Stealers	Hands
5. Trap	Mouth
6. Hoof	Foot
7. Dogs	Feet
8. Peeper	Eye
9. Lamp	Eye
10. Nozzle	Nose
11. Bean	Head
12. Dome	Head
13. Ticker	Heart
14. Pins	Legs
15. Bread Basket	Stomach
16. Dukes	Hands

This whole study ended in a discussion of the nature of slang, and an examination of the question of why some metaphor is considered good, and some is called slang. Why, for instance, is Kipling writing "good English" when he speaks of the "brow of a lighthouse," while a sports writer who speaks of a batter being hit "on the dome," or "on the bean," is known to be using slang? In none of the work, until the end, was the word *metaphor* used; and in none of it was there theoretical discussion of metaphor as such. Whatever generalizations were made were tentative, drawn inductively from actual material. The whole study had noticeable and immediate effect upon the ability of this class to deal intelligently with simple metaphor in the prose and poetry that they went on to read.

An occasional single exercise, preferably taken from the students' daily work, can be so devised as to give further

practice in metaphor and in other elements of language and meaning. The following will serve as an example. It will not be difficult for a teacher who has followed this report to this point to see what is involved here. In using this kind of pre-fabricated exercise, however, it has been found important to work from student responses to principles, rather than from principles which the teacher hopes to illustrate through the exercise. If the exercise is well graded to the class, most of the points the teacher wishes to raise by the topics A, B, C, and D, will be brought out by one or another member of the class. If any slip by unnoticed, however, it is better to let them go, and to try to bring out the same points later on with different material.

Study the following poems carefully, then answer the questions asked about them.

A Rhyme of Harvest [1]

See! The wide cornfields are shining like gold;
Heavy the ears with the grain that they hold.
Cut them, O reapers, this bright autumn day,
Bind them, and carry, and stow them away.

See! The slow wagon brings over the hill
Grain for the miller to grind in his mill.
Hurry, O miller, it must not be late,
Down in the town for the flour they wait.

See! The kind baker in cap clean and white,
Busily working from morning till night,
Kneading and baking for you and for me
Bread for our breakfast and cakes for our tea.
—LUCY DIAMOND

[1] Reprinted by permission from *Treasures of English Verse*, Herbert Strang's Library, Oxford University Press, 1929.

July, 1916

In her first stanza the poet describes the quiet beauty of the English countryside; she continues in her second stanza: [1]

But over there, in France, the grass is torn and trodden,
Our pastures grow moon daisies, but *theirs* are strewn with lead.
The fertile, kindly fields are harassed and blood-sodden,
The sheaves they bear for harvesting will be our garnered dead.
—W. M. LETTS

 A. Mention every detail you can in which the "harvesting" of the second poem is like the harvesting of the first poem. It is not necessary that these be specifically mentioned in the poems.
 B. Similarly, mention the most significant ways in which the harvestings differ.
 C. If you were struck in reading the poems by any other differences or similarities, tell what these are.
 D. "Metaphor sometimes relies for its force more on implied contrast than upon similarity." Comment, with the second poem in mind.

Another useful exercise in metaphor is to give the class a metaphor in either prose or poetry and ask them to suggest other metaphors that might have been used in the same passage. They then compare their metaphors with the original and with each other, showing what each metaphor does that the others do not do, and discussing which one is the best one in that context; that is, which comes closest to achieving all the meanings and effects probably intended, and to keeping out all meanings and intents probably not intended. President Roosevelt's pump-priming metaphor, for instance, emerges from such a process as one admirably suited to his purpose for many reasons, not the

[1] W. M. Letts, "July, 1916," in *The Spires of Oxford* (New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1917), p. 27.

least of which are the simplicity of the operation of a pump; the general knowledge about pumps on the part of Americans, who like to think of themselves as having been brought up on the farm; and the pump's association with simple, rugged, frugal rural life. An interesting comparison here was made in the class. One member ran across a different metaphorical handling of the same spending program in the report of a public-utilities president to his stockholders. He likewise used a metaphor admirably suited to his purposes: he called the government's spending program "Running a car on its battery."

ELEMENTS OF MEANING

The teacher of English is often confronted by the student who can see nothing in writing beyond its plain sense-meaning. Such a student approaches poetry, for instance, skeptically or not at all. "Why didn't he say what he means in plain prose?" is an honest question frequently heard; and it demands an honest answer. It is generally useless to point out the "beauties of style" or the "wonderful emotion" and ask the doubter to see them. If he has not seen them in the first place, it is because he is not ready to see them, and assuring him that they are there will not help him. His difficulty may have several causes; one of them is likely to be a failure on his part to realize that language has any function beyond that of conveying factual information. He has not seen that it can also be used effectively to convey feelings or attitudes. If the teacher begins to reveal this fact to him by using poetry for material, the student is still likely to remain unconvinced, or to regard poetry as some special sort of magical and not altogether masculine form of linguistic rite. In dealing with this situation some schools have tried successfully the experiment of setting the student

loose in investigating all the different kinds of work words do in his everyday reading. He is asked to include all his in-and-out-of-school reading in his search. As the hunt warms, he runs down comic strips, editorials, sensational news reports, advertisements. In such media, which he understands and reads for his own devices, he is at home. He can see easily enough here how words perform many different functions. Among these, the expression and creation of feelings and attitudes are certain to be numbered. The teacher may then turn the student to the task of finding all possible instances of this use of words, or of keeping a record of them when he strikes them in his reading. Ordinary prose will soon appear to be full of them. Finally, he gets back to poetry, which is no longer a strange and mystic language, but perhaps writing that does for a higher purpose and in a more effective manner what he has observed first in the lowly surroundings of the daily newspaper or favorite magazine.

RANGE OF MATERIAL

Although, as a practical matter, much of the material used in class, particularly in the early stages, will probably consist of short passages, the same principles apply to the interpretation of passages of any length, and are of equal importance in long passages. It is not the intent of this Committee to recommend intense scrutiny of minutiae to the exclusion of interpreting a book as a whole, or to understanding it as a whole. We do believe, however, that students can best see and grasp at first in comparatively short passages the fundamental principles of language; and we believe that it is upon these same principles that an understanding, or "appreciation," of a complete work rests. In a whole book, for instance, an author has his attitudes toward

his reader, toward himself, toward the world as he sees it. He draws his conclusions or paints his picture of life out of his own experience; and he will find it difficult or impossible to communicate to a reader who has had no comparable experience. Each part of a longer work derives its full meaning from a still wider context: the stanza from the poem; the act from the play; the chapter from the book; and the whole book, possibly, from the full context of the author's complete life and work. There is the same necessity, too, to see in the whole book and in our statements about the book and interpretation of it, that close relationship of words to life, experience, and realities that is one of the central doctrines of this report.

Longer and longer passages may of course be taken up in class. The form and structure of longer passages, which are inseparable from the other elements of their meaning, will naturally be studied. But such a study might well be begun with most simple material, and even held in the background until students are well on their way toward knowing how words themselves behave. Although form, as we have said, is an inseparable part of the meaning, and eventually should appear to be so, we believe it to be important to concentrate the attention first upon what the words themselves are really doing. It is probably best, therefore, thoroughly to familiarize the student with the techniques of analyzing the meanings of the words themselves before diverting his attention too much to their larger patterns. Once a fair beginning has been made on the sort of analysis we have sketched, form will easily be grasped; and, in actual practice, it will be found that form has pretty largely been taken care of in the process of close analysis. This is particularly true of what might be called "logical form," for logical inconsistencies are more likely to

appear and are more difficult to detect in shifts of meaning, in using metaphorical language as if it were literal, in using abstractions as if they were absolute, than in faultiness of the larger patterns. In the full examination of context necessary for the interpretation of the words used, whatever in the formal pattern is pertinent is likely to be brought to light.

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

As an example of what we mean here, as well as an example of what we have called the operational type of analysis, it might be helpful to examine a case actually analyzed by a twelfth-grade class. The essay "Adventures in Philosophy," from Ellwood Hendrick's [1] *Percolator Papers*, was being read. A fair summary of a part of that essay might read, 'A tree, seen close by, is green; the same tree, seen at a distance, is blue. The statements, *The tree is green*, and *The tree is blue*, though apparently contradictory, therefore, are not so in reality. They are consistent parts of a larger truth. Just so, the statements, *We have free will*, and *We have not free will*, are not contradictory statements, since each may be a part of a larger truth."

This summary fully recognizes the form and logical structure of a considerable part of the essay; and if ability to make a fair summary reflecting the form were all there is involved in good reading, one would have to accept this summary as conclusive evidence of a good reading of the essay. But what happens to the analogy when we subject it to some of the techniques of interpretation we have outlined? What is meant by "A tree *is* green"? Here it means "seems," which operationally means that the tree has ab-

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[1] Ellwood Hendrick, *Percolator Papers* (New York, Harper and Bros., 1919), "Adventures in Philosophy," pp. 62–90.

sorbed all the light rays except the green, which it reflects to the eye. These rays, if they travel any distance, become merged with other rays; hence the "blue." So, when we say the tree *is* green, we mean that it *has* (absorbs) every light wave *except* those that generally give us the sensation of green. And this is true wherever we stand, and whatever the intervening atmosphere and our eyes and brains do to the green waves, for which, so to speak, the tree has no responsibility, having just shot them indiscriminately back at us through the intervening atmosphere. Just how to analyze operationally the author's statement that we have (or have not) free will is a problem we need not enter into here. But it is clear from the operational analysis of the "green and blue tree" that his analogy is not sound. It is seen to have the form: "*A* seems both *C* and *D*. Therefore *X* can both have and not have *Y*." His statements about free will may be true. (Though it is hard to see how they both can be. When we make the statements we probably indulge in a shift of meaning of *free will*.) The falsity of the analogy does not disprove the point; but the analogy fails to substantiate it. This analysis will perhaps illustrate the futility of an analysis of mere form which has not been preceded by a consideration of the uses (or misuses) to which an author is putting his words.

The use of *is*, incidentally, as Richards [1] points out in *Interpretation in Teaching*, is central to the distinction between definitions and the various kinds of statements, and to all logic, and sooner or later emerges as one of the major concerns of interpretation in some kinds of discourse. The following exercise was found useful in gathering up many previous discussions of this subject with an eleventh grade class.

[1] I. A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), pp. 299-345.

I. Rewrite each of the following sentences with as little change in wording as possible, but without using the word *is*. Keep the meaning as close as possible to the original.

II. If you think of a use of *is* not illustrated in any of these sentences, write a sentence illustrating it, and "translate" the sentence.

III. Try to classify the following sentences as statements of different kinds, or as definitions. Answer by numbers only.
1. He is a fool.
2. The book is on the table.
3. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points.
4. A quart is two pints.
5. Slavery is the lowest state of man.
6. One and one is two.
7. This is my book.
8. Fascism is a form of government in which the individual is subordinate to the State.
9. Italy is a Fascist country.
10. There is not another man like him anywhere on earth.
11. This is my right hand.
12. This man is my brother.
13. My parents' son is my brother.
14. Is everything all right?
15. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

IV. Try to think how you would go about verifying whichever of the above propositions are capable of verification.

In expanding such sentences, the legitimate uses of the dictionary become clear, as well as its limitations. Almost invariably at first, some students will rush to a dictionary and attempt to solve their difficulties by substituting dictionary definitions for the words that need expansion, expounding, or definition. If they could, indeed, fix for every word one sense-meaning, or even one of a limited number of sense-meanings (not to mention its other types of meaning), and if the meaning of the discourse were simply the sum of the meanings of the words which compose it, in-

terpretation and comprehension would be a comparatively easy matter. All they would need would be time and a good dictionary. But to see that these will not serve, they have only to apply this conception of language to any sentence which goes beyond a literal statement involving only physical entities. To illustrate this, the sentence already partially expounded in this report, "All men are created equal" might be paired with "If two quantities are equal to the same quantity, they are equal to each other." As elucidated by a good dictionary, the first sentence becomes "All men are created exactly the same in measure, quantity, number, or degree; or like in value, quality, status, or position." There is scarcely even a hint here of any of the meanings that *equal* has in the original sentence. In the next sentence, it does well enough: "If two quantities are exactly the same in measure, quantity, number or degree; or like in value, quality, status, or position, to another quantity, they are exactly the same in measure, quantity, number or degree; or like in value, quality, status, or position, to each other." It is worth noting that even in this last, literal sentence, the student must choose somehow from among the dictionary definitions, fastening upon "exactly the same in quantity," and discarding "like in value."

The process by which we make this discrimination is worth attention, since it illustrates a basic principle of the way in which words get their meaning for an individual. The student will know from experience that the sentence "Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other" applies to contexts of physics and mathematics, where physical objects and such physical properties as weight are being considered. He will know from experience, for instance, that if two angles are both measured by a protractor as 30°, they are identical in measurement, and that

the sentence quoted is a generalization based upon this and similar experiences. When he turns to a dictionary, he simply chooses the verbal expansion of *equal* which checks with these experiences. This is a comparatively simple matter in such contexts, where words are being used literally, to refer to such physical experiences.

But where the word begins to expand metaphorically, as in "All men are created *equal*," the student will see that he cannot expect much help from the dictionary. Here, the first and most important step in interpretation is to realize that he is dealing with metaphor. The next step would be an examination of the metaphor. In the physical world, equality is established only by having some quality to measure, and then measuring it, by counting the number of times it contains an arbitrarily fixed unit. For instance, two sticks are equal in length if they both measure six inches; or in weight if they both weigh six ounces; or in color if they both reflect light waves of the same vibration-rate. Thus examining his metaphor, his first discovery is that men are not created equal in any measurable quality. He is forced to admit that such vague "qualities" as having opportunity are in no way measurable by reference to any fixed unit. Having canvassed the possibilities of the metaphor in such ways as this, the next step in interpretation may be similar to the one taken in determining the meaning of *equal* in its physical, literal context. That is, he must fall back on his experience, and find some metaphorical meaning for *equal* which makes it "check" in the sentence, "All men are created equal." At the completion of such a process of interpretation, the sentence might emerge in some such way as this: "It would be pleasing to me if all men, in this country, were given opportunity to develop their talents as far and as fast as they are capable of doing; and if they were to receive an income which I should regard

as commensurate with their service to the community."

Similarly, the relations between words and realities can
be introduced at an early age. Here the crafts and the lab-
oratory courses in the sciences can be heavily drawn upon
by the teacher of language. A student can make something
in the crafts shop, and then try to put into words the opera-
tions by which he made it. Another student can then fol-
low his operational definition of the article as closely as
he can with the actual materials in the craft shop; or he can
try to identify the article from a miscellaneous lot of some-
what similar articles; or he can simply go through the mak-
ing process in his mind and see how clearly the definition
leads him on. Similar connections between words and physi-
cal realia can be made in connection with science courses,
for instance in setting up apparatus. Once the connection
has been made at the physical level of realia, it can be
carried on into the more difficult realm of general state-
ments and abstractions. Here again science courses are in-
valuable, since they give a student the foundation of making
generalizations from purely physical phenomena that he
has observed.

Another device that has been found useful, particularly
as a diagnostic measure to give the teacher some idea about
the way in which a student connects the words he uses with
the world he knows, is to ask him to write a composition the
title of which is a statement of what he believes to be a
fact, and in which he gives his reasons for considering his
statement a statement of fact. Such an assignment given to
a class furnishes a wealth of material for almost all angles
of the study of language.

ABSTRACTIONS

A class does not have to be taken far into the theory of
abstractions to see the distinction between the sort of thing

named, or pointed to, by the word *pencil*, and the "thing" referred to by the word *justice*. It is also simple to work out with a class the fact that *justice* and words like it are more likely to give rise to misunderstanding, that is, to varying interpretations, than *pencil* and words like it. If we say "Give me a pencil" or "He has a pencil," there is little danger that anybody will misunderstand us. Practically everyone whose native language is English would put the same interpretation upon our words, and this interpretation would correspond closely to what we have in mind. But if we say "Give me justice," or "He will have justice," we may have many meanings, depending upon the whole situation and attitudes toward it. Moreover, even if the situation is known to all our readers or listeners, there is small chance that what we have said will mean identically the same to any two of them, and there is less chance that any one of their interpretations will get at what we have in mind as closely as would be the case if we were talking about pencils.

A class can also see for itself that a misunderstanding about justice, in the long run, is likely to have more disastrous results than one about pencils; that in general it is exactly when we are using abstractions that a high degree of understanding is desirable. Abstractions, furthermore, besides being more open to misunderstanding and more fraught with danger if misunderstood, are more difficult to expound. We can point to, or hold up for inspection, a pencil, if misunderstanding arises. We cannot do this for *justice*. Finally, an abstraction is more likely to carry with it an emotional appeal than a word that has a simple physical referent, and the emotions fortify the misunderstanding. Though this is by no means always so, and we cannot be dogmatic about it, at the same time it is worth noticing that while words like *pencil* are frequently used with little

or no emotional charge, words like *justice, truth, liberty, treachery,* can hardly ever be entirely free from it; so that it is perhaps particularly when abstractions are being used that the reader must consider the intent of the writer. Is he really trying to convey facts about a human situation, or an event, or is he trying to stir an emotion in the reader so that he will act in a certain way, or feel in a certain way, or take certain attitudes?

Here, although the teacher will be talking about separate words for a large part of the time, particularly at the beginning of the work, it is important not to let the class get the notion that the word by itself carries one special or fixed emotional charge or one set connotation. The evocative power of the word, its intended effects upon the feelings of the reader, or the feelings of the writer which it is intended to bring to the reader's attention, depend, like its sense-meaning and all its other meanings, upon the context; that is, upon the experience caught up in the word, and upon the situation or setting. As this point can be more clearly seen through the sense-meaning, it is perhaps better to familiarize the student at first, and quite early, with the idea that the context determines sense-meaning. The same idea can then be quite easily transferred to the other effects of the word. It is also important for him to remember that different abstractions even in the same context will have quite different evocative effects upon different readers, depending, as do all meanings, upon their experience. Students have found interesting and profitable exercises in which they use the same word, either a physical-entity word or an abstraction, in short paragraphs, in each of which the word has approximately the same sense-meaning, but differs in other meanings or effects. Familiar literature furnishes many excellent starting points. A comparison of Touchstone's

Tomorrow is the joyful day, Audrey; tomorrow will we be married.[1]

with Macbeth's

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.[2]

can be used to illustrate the point.

But to return to abstractions. Once these points have been established, a class can be taken on into the methods of resolving abstractions. These will usually come down to an examination of the situation in which the word is used, or an expansion of the term into the total operations for which it stands. It will be a verbal filling out (what Bentham [3] calls "Phraseoplerosis"), but a filling out in terms that stand closer to actual things and actions than the abstraction itself. An abstraction is a sort of shorthand that stands for a set of situations or actions. Thus the word *tradition* may be said to stand for certain things having been done in a certain way for a certain length of time.

This method of interpretation by means of translating into operations is, of course, not confined to the matter of expounding abstractions. It is generally useful and applicable. It is not a mere paraphrase, and may not be a paraphrase at all, but rather a reduction of meanings to a level as near as possible to things and acts. A student's ordinary reading of current material, of history, or science, or other studies, gives ample practice material.

The following exercise, set in an English class upon a textbook [4] being studied in the history class, will give an

[1] *As You Like It*, Act V, Scene 3.

[2] *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene 5.

[3] C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), p. 86.

[4] Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1937), Vol. I, pp. 201, 203, 205 (quoted from letter from Turgot to Dr. Price in 1778), 206, 207, 225. (Italics ours.)

illustration. Metaphor, of course, is as usual inevitably involved.

Directions—

Expand each of the following passages, quoted from one of your history reference books, into paragraphs of about forty or fifty words. In your expansion do not use any of the underlined words or phrases. Your expansion should be aimed toward making the meaning of the passage clear and "operational." The passages should be completely rewritten; do not merely substitute a "synonym" which involves the same abstraction as the underlined word. For instance, in passage 5, do not simply put for "America" an easy phrase like "this country" or "this land," but expand it until it becomes clear exactly what is meant by "America."

1. If the proper object of *society* be to produce and maintain an *aristocracy*, Virginia had achieved it. If it be to *maintain a high general level* of comfort and *intelligence*, she had not.
2. The plantation system never *obtained a strong foothold* in North Carolina; the *state* remained a *farming democracy*, aided by rather than based upon *chattel slavery*.
3. "The Americans should be an *example* of *political, religious, commercial* and *industrial liberty.*"
4. There was one dominant *force* in American *history* that no one foresaw in 1785: the *expansive* force.
5. The *frontier* has vanished with the wild Indian, and *America's youth* is *waning fast.*
6. Hamilton's *political theories* had more *validity* for the future *America* than for the *simple society* with whose *common mind and condition* Jefferson's *theories agreed.*

Similar exercises in expansion of abstractions may involve shifts of meaning, as in the two that follow. The first runs:

Rewrite the following sentences without using any of the underlined words; you may make as many versions of each sentence as you like.

1. The *government* of a country of such diverse interests presents difficult problems to the *government.*

Harvard has an excellent course in *government*.

It has been said that a Democratic *government* is a *government* not of men but of *laws*.

2. It is a *law* of physics that the intensity of light varies inversely with the square of the distance.

There is a *law* in Massachusetts against driving over fifty miles per hour.

One of the oldest struggles of civilized man has been to achieve *liberty* within the *law*.

3. Patrick Henry said, "Give me *liberty* or give me death." *Liberty* is listed in the Declaration of Independence as one of the inalienable rights of man.

On Thanksgiving day the Governor will give several convicts their *liberty*.

In this country we enjoy some *liberties* that cannot be enjoyed under the present *political* set-up in Germany.

4. Jefferson made a great study of *politics*.

That dishonest candidate was defeated because, in his previous administration, he had played *politics*.

What are your *politics?*

The President made a *political* mistake in his uncompromising stand on that issue.

The second involves similar techniques of interpretation:

I. Expand fully the following statements, making entirely clear what you take to be the meaning of each.

II. Certain words are identical in A and B. Examine all of these. Discuss fully any of these that shift their meaning between A and B. Include in your discussion not only an explanation of what the shift is, but also your explanation of exactly how it comes about.

A. We shall preserve this a government not by people, but by law.

B. Government by the people shall not perish from the earth.

Still another type of assignment has been found useful. It can be varied in difficulty, in length, and in the kind of linguistic problem that is involved. It consists of setting a

short passage, perhaps simply a single sentence, and asking
students to write down in full what they believe it to mean,
and whether or not they agree with what is being said.
This exercise is likely to bring out many unexpected
points. For example, Lowell's [1] sentence "Noble architec-
ture is one element of patriotism . . ." brought the re-
sponse:

Lowell, I think, means that to have lovely and noble build-
ings is an evidence of patriotism. Personally, I disagree with
him. It helps to have noble architecture but that there is none
does not mean that there is a lack of patriotism. One can be
very patriotic without having impressive buildings to inspire
him. Probably to look at a fine building would fill one with
pride for his country and thus fire him with patriotism, and,
therefore, it is probably true to call noble architecture an ele-
ment of patriotism.

Here an analysis of the writer's apparent self-contra-
diction brings out to a class the difficulty that even writers
such as Lowell have in controlling such slippery and am-
biguous words as *architecture* and *patriotism;* for the
writer of the comment, without realizing it, has put two
entirely different interpretations upon the original sen-
tence, one of which he regards as stating an untruth, and
the other as stating a truth.

CONTEXT

Throughout all this, let us emphasize again, countless
questions will arise that can be solved only by reference to
the complete context, thus early giving a natural oppor-
tunity for laying the foundation in the student's mind of
the context theory and its operation in all language. All
the elements of language, in fact, can be naturally intro-
duced, as they become necessary to the student's complete

[1] James Russell Lowell, "A Moosehead Journal," in *Literary Essays.*

understanding of what he is reading in English and other classes, and the complete analysis of meaning which we have made here will gradually emerge, the class working always from material to theory, rather than from theory to material. Eventually a class should be ready and eager to work out by itself, in its own reading, a reasonably complete analysis of meaning along the lines we have suggested in this report. Finally, a class might work out for itself some such outline of the elements of the principles of language and its workings as we have suggested in this report.

CLASSROOM TEACHING OF INTERPRETATION

During all stages of this process one form of fruitful experimentation in teaching seems to us to be the method used by Richards [1] in the exercises upon which his *Practical Criticism* is based. In this experiment, short poems were given to students, without authors, with the simple instructions to comment fully in writing. This method is a good diagnosis of the reading difficulties of the class, and a good opening wedge into the study of interpretation. The *completeness* of the interpretation, as we have said, will depend upon the ground covered in previous work in interpretation, and upon the new elements of language illustrated by the passage. Certainly, after any considerable work upon the *separate elements* of language we have described, these and similar exercises should be used to *fuse* the elements; that is, to show how, in any passage, those elements do not operate singly, but interoperate in harmony. However convenient it may be for purposes of analysis and teaching to separate the elements of interpretation, they are in fact fused in any form of discourse. This should never be lost sight of by teacher or student; and the exer-

[1] I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929).

cise of a reasonably *complete* interpretation is invaluable in confirming this vital principle in the mind of teacher and student alike.

Many adaptations of this method are possible. A short poem or self-contained passage of prose may be examined and the class asked simply to comment fully upon it in writing; or certain questions designed to uncover the real kernel or controversial part of the passage may be asked. Depending upon the difficulty of the passage, the writing may be done after a five-minute study, or after a much longer period, even being set as an advance assignment several days or even a week ahead. The reports on the passage may then be read, compared, commented upon.

In this work the relation of the teacher to the class is of the highest importance. The purpose of the exercise should constantly be kept in mind by the teacher, and it is this purpose which sets the tone of the classroom situation. For it is not the intent of such an exercise to arrive at the "right answer" or "right interpretation" of the passage involved. It will soon become evident even to the most dogmatic of teachers that there is no "right answer," and no full interpretation of even the simplest of passages. However uninvolved the idea in the mind of the writer, however clear his writing, and however sensitive the mind of the reader, there can never be any certainty in human communication that a *complete* idea has succeeded in being transferred from one mind to another. The teacher's attitude, therefore, should be that of a fellow-explorer into the meaning of the passage. Certainly he should never be more than a guide. He should never attempt to push or pull the unwilling mind of a student into accepting what he himself believes. His explanation, of course, should be given, but never as the conclusive and ultimate word. It should be given merely as another interpretation, or as what the

teacher considers, in the light of all that has been said, to be the best interpretation available at the moment. Each individual in the class should be left free to accept it, to reject it, or to modify it for himself. For the purpose behind this exercise is not to find one meaning for one passage. It is rather to stimulate the student to do his own thinking and to improve his own methods of reading and thinking. The passage involved is simply one element in a total situation set up to stimulate the process of thinking in words. It is this process itself which is valuable, and whatever the teacher does to block this process defeats the aim of the exercise.

This does not mean that the teacher assumes the artificial rôle of being just another student. In fact, in any discussion of this sort there is set up in the classroom what we
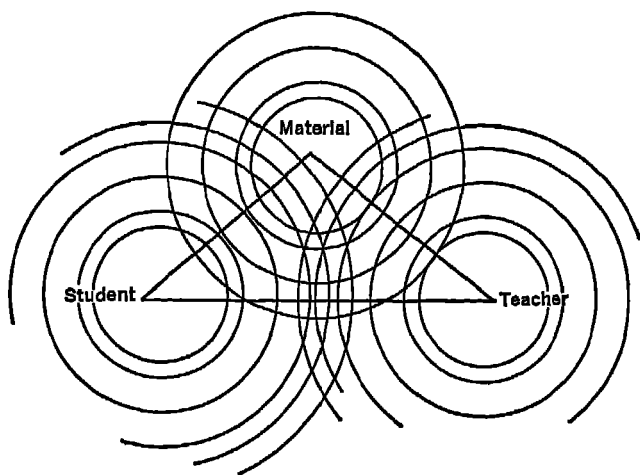
cussion of this sort there is set up in the classroom what we may call an event, and it is the teacher's province to shape and guide the event. The event might be diagramed as above. At one point of the triangle lies the material or

writer, at another the teacher, at the third a student. The circles at these points represent the experience of writer, teacher, and student. Again it is important to emphasize the fact that words divorced from experience do not convey their full meaning. It is, therefore, important to choose as material a passage which will lie, at least to some extent, within the experience of the teacher and of the students. A skillful teacher will draw out from within the student's realm of experience connecting links to the circle of the author. The process will be more the leading of the student to the writer than the verbal thrusting of the writer upon the student by authority. As the event takes shape, the pooling of the experience of teacher and students enlarges the circles at their corners of the triangle until more and more they seem with some certainty to include larger parts of the experience of the writer. But the interpretation held at the end of the hour by every person in the class, including the teacher, must be based upon his own individual experience, of which the class exercise has now become a part. But even this last hour passed in common must be viewed differently by different individuals, so that it cannot be expected to resolve differences in interpretation, which must inevitably go back to different experiences.

It does not follow that in the full reading and interpretation of a passage the passage acts simply as a release for the reader's irrelevant associations, or that the process of reading is a process of free association. On the contrary, the problem of good reading and interpretation is always to control the free association of the reader in the attempt to get at what the author intends, and the teacher must always shape the discussion toward that end. Nor does the fact that there is no one "right" interpretation mean that there are not many wrong ones. Although there is no "right answer," bounds will be set within which possible or reasonable in-

terpretations will lie. During the process of class discussion, these bounds, however wide and shadowy, are generally set by common consent; and in the meanwhile a student whose interpretation of the passage is demonstrably mistaken will have come to realize it by himself.

Students place mistaken interpretations upon a passage for various reasons, and a part of the value of such exercises is to lead the student to see what stands between him and a tenable interpretation. Not infrequently, paradoxically enough, the reality and vividness of his own experiences, which alone can vitalize words for him, can and do lead him far astray in his search for the author's meaning; and a word, phrase, or idea which has for him a high emotional charge, or what we might call a high coefficient of association, will send him off on his own hunt far from the trail laid by the author. A wise teacher will respect the integrity of such association and may even see in it some new and important source of light shed upon the personality of the student. But he will, at the same time, be able to show the student how and where he has gone off in his reading. Good reading becomes then not the submersion of the reader in his own experiences and associations, but rather the direction, selection, control, and finally the enrichment of these experiences and associations. Good reading extends experiences in the direction of the writer until, to go back to our diagram, the reader and writer circles overlap as much as possible. Only by experience can the student discover what this direction is; and such discussions under a good teacher who is also a competent reader we believe to be the best sort of practice. Many types of difficulty arise, but with ingenuity these can be successfully resolved if the teacher keeps in view the same general principles, examining not so much the student's mistake as the causes which lie behind it, and trying, therefore, not so much to

set him right as to make clear to him the reasons for his
having gone wrong and the methods by which he can in
the future avoid similar slips. Eventually, we believe that
constant practice of this sort will improve not only the
student's technique in reading, but his ability to handle
language in all its functions, including writing and verbal
thinking.

This type of exercise should be much more elastic, di-
versified, and inclusive than the "précis." In the précis ex-
ercise as at present practised, the student is asked simply
to put the sense of the passage into his own words, or to
extract "the central thought," or to state briefly the "mean-
ing." Although this type of exercise has its value, it does
not lead to the kind of exploration of a passage here in-
tended. In the kind of exercise here sketched the teacher
keeps in mind the many kinds of "meaning"; not only the
"sense-meaning" extracted by the précis, but also the ele-
ments already stressed in this report. He would explore the
full context, the nuances of this fuller meaning, the inter-
play of word upon word.

The précis exercise, in fact, useful as it is for some pur-
poses, in no way comes to close grips with meanings. The
making of a précis is valuable practice in noting the form
or structure of the discourse, in seeing the relationships
that its parts have to each other, and in weighing the rel-
ative importance of the parts. This is, indisputably, an
important element in the interpretation of some passages.
On the other hand, the meaning of a passage cannot be
examined, clarified, or expounded through a process of
condensation. The process of the précis is not the process
of arriving at what is being said. We have shown that the
analysis of metaphor, the analysis of abstractions, opera-
tional definition, and the general technique of operational
analysis, the analysis of the meaning of generalizations

through their exemplification by the specific instances from which they are derived, in fact, all the processes by which we come at an exploration and understanding of what is being said, involve verbal expansion. The précis, unaccompanied by such expansion at least of key words, is not likely to get the reader much nearer to the meanings intended by the writer.

Much the same can be said of the ordinary practice of paraphrasing. This is too likely to consist of a synonym-for-synonym translation, which leaves the original more awkward but no more intelligible. There is usually no attention paid to rendering in language closer to the level of operations. Words that call for expansion are left as single synonyms, or as simple circumlocutions, which are likely to change the original meaning in some way without getting appreciably closer to it. Attention is too likely to be centered upon single words, one at a time, rather than upon the larger sense units or upon the complete context. Both paraphrase and précis are too easily converted into testing devices masquerading as teaching methods, thus confusing objectives and issues. In fact, it is an open question whether paraphrase and précis by themselves are not better suited to testing than to teaching; whether they are not better adapted to finding out what a student has understood in a passage than to helping him to a better understanding of it. Rules of thumb given in many textbooks on paraphrasing and précis-writing, such as that the ideal précis should be about one-third of the length of the original, seem to us to minister to the whims of examiners rather than to the needs of students in coping with the intricate realities of language.

Reading aloud and dramatics may play an important part in language study and interpretation of the sort we have described. Many of the elements of meaning we have

enumerated become much more clear to a student if, through reading and dramatics, he can actually see and hear and, in a sense, make these meanings with his own nerves and muscles. A class can easily be shown how the whole meaning of a passage can be changed by reading it at different speeds, with different tones, different pauses, different emphases and different rhythms, and can realize more easily, after once hearing this done, the importance of other elements of meaning besides the literal sense-meaning or denotative meaning. Conversely, reading aloud on the part of the student is an excellent aid and impetus to full interpretation, since the problems of interpretation must be solved for better or worse before a passage can be read. This applies particularly to dramatics. The problem of interpreting the printed page is in part the problem of restoring to written language much of what is lost when spoken and acted word is turned into written word; of restoring, that is, such elements as tone of voice, emphasis, gesture, and facial expression. It is for this reason that the ability to interpret writing is so vastly more difficult to achieve than the ability to interpret the spoken word. With no tones of voice and no gestures present as an aid, all the meanings must be detected from the written word. This perhaps explains the emphasis put upon the more difficult art of interpretation of writing in this report.

WIDE READING

Two points should be made before we leave this question of reading. The first is that it is not the intent of this report to set the kind of close reading advocated against a wide reading. In fact, the two go hand in hand. Wide reading is as much a part of the experience necessary for the acquisition of a power to read well, as the power to read

well is necessary for realizing the benefits to be gained from wide reading.

TESTING

It may also be well to point out that such exercises as are here described are in no way testing exercises. Especially today there is danger that techniques of the kind described will be considered testing techniques and will appeal to those responsible for the development of testing programs. Certain exercises that seem on the surface to be somewhat similar have been used and are used today as parts of language tests, and, with possibly a few changes, some of the examples we have given might be deflected into this channel. But this is far from the aims of this report. The process which we advocate is a teaching process, and to turn it into a testing process is completely to misunderstand its aims and the basic theories upon which it is founded. It is indeed doubtful whether objective tests, especially those of the true-false and multiple-choice type, can even test the sort of ability to deal with language which we propose as the objective of the teaching of language. The items of such tests must be confined to questions with four or five categorical answers about the passage selected. One of these answers must be right and the others wrong. There are two difficulties here. In the first place, the test-maker constructs the questions. As we explain later in this report, one of the tests of good reading is the ability of the reader to ask himself, in his own mind, the pertinent questions about what he is reading. It is one thing to check one answer out of four or five given to a question also given; it is quite another, in interpreting a passage, to construct one's own questions of a sort that are pertinent to the full meaning of the passage, and to arrive at one's own answer. An abil-

ity to do the first by no means necessarily implies an ability to do the second.

In the second place, there are few passages about which there can be asked significant questions that have one demonstrably right answer. This is particularly true if the answer is the single-word type that an objective test generally employs. Interpretation is a matter of weighing the meaning, of expanding the passage in different directions, of trial and error. There is always a chance that any one person, or any group of persons, even teachers and test-makers, may be wrong or at best incomplete in their reading of a passage. It is almost an impossibility for anyone to say, "This is certainly the right answer, and the only right answer," when the interpretation involves any point beyond mere questions of fact. The words used in the questions and answers themselves, moreover, under the pressure of the necessity for concentration, are likely to be abstractions which themselves need expansion. Items like the following appear, for instance, upon literary acquaintance tests: "A poet whose cynicism and pessimism are expressed in exquisite, haunting verse is *a*) A. E. Housman; *b*) Robert Browning; *c*) Robert Burns." Here the expected right answer would be "Housman." The answer is "right" in one sense; that is, it is a reasonable response to make. Under almost any concept of "pessimism" Housman might emerge from that company, by a process of elimination, a "cynic and pessimist." But this leaves the test-taker faced with the necessity of labeling Housman "cynic and pessimist." There is no telling, in this snippet of a context, what is meant by "cynicism and pessimism." No writer can be so neatly put up in capsules. A student can easily be taught to apply such verbal tags to authors; but this process does not bring with it either an understanding of the author, or of the meaning of the tag. The same sort

of difficulty is present in literary comprehension or "appreciation" tests. Questions of critical judgment are condensed into single words, themselves controversial. A poem is given, and the test-taker asked to decide whether it might most appropriately be characterized by the word *mystical, eerie, mysterious,* or *unreal.* The test-maker must make the assumption that the tone or mood of a poem can be described by one word; or that the feeling of the poem is given particularly by one word in the poem.

It appears, then, that the difficulties of constructing objective tests that will adequately measure the kind of interpretation of a passage that we have attempted to describe are considerable, and that they have not been sufficiently realized, let alone overcome. There is grave danger, moreover, that teachers, influenced by these tests, will unconsciously accept the theories of language implicit in them, and that in preparing their students to meet these tests successfully, they will implant in them a purely verbalistic attitude toward language and literature. Objective tests, in short, at present not only seem to be unsuccessful in testing the ability to interpret discourse, but they also appear to exert an influence detrimental to a sound teaching of that ability.

It is not our intent here to lay at the door of those responsible for the construction of objective tests blame for what we conceive to be a misdirection of English studies. Test-makers must follow the lead of teachers. They are entirely justified in considering their province to be the testing of what teachers are teaching, what teachers want tested. They cannot be expected to initiate. We simply wish to point out the fact that tests can be a powerful influence in fortifying bad educational practices as well as good. We suggest also that testing bodies familiarize themselves at first-hand with the problems that confront the

teacher of English, and with the theories of language that underlie them; that they work with forward-looking and progressive teachers in constructing tests which will aid teachers in guiding the teaching of English, language and literature, into channels better calculated to achieve sound and lasting results. Some of the most influential testing agencies, fully aware of the present situation, are already doing this.

COMPOSITION

The elements stressed in writing would be those emphasized in reading. It should eventually be clear to a student that his constant obligation in writing is to make clear to the reader what he intends to convey by his words, and that all his words are defined by the context he has given them. The art of writing, then, unfolds itself to him as the art of control of the words he is using as they are affected by other words, a control that insures the communication not only of the sense-meaning of what he has to say, but also of his attitude toward his subject and his reader, his intent, his feeling.

A close study of words in reading should give him a respect for the use of a word in writing; and a vivid and clear realization of the word used should always be demanded. In fact, the student should as far as possible subject what he has written to the same close interpretation he puts upon his reading. Ideally, as he masters the technique of close reading, he will become a better and better critic of what he himself writes. It is a useful and sobering experience for a student (or for a teacher!) to translate into simple words such abstractions as *realism, romanticism, democracy, good literature, poetry, right, justice*—the list is endless. Compositions, in English and all other classes, bristle with similar terms, each one an opportunity for

the teacher of English and other subjects to aid the student in searching and clarifying his own thought. For it cannot be too often repeated that such an exploration of words is no mere verbal game; it goes to the roots of thinking and understanding.

BASIC ENGLISH

The value of Basic English [1] as an exercise in interpretation and in composition is beginning to be explored, and seems to us to be potentially very great. The distinctive features of the analysis of language that produced Basic English are just those characteristics of language whose importance is the major concern of this report. The indications are that it may prove a most useful instrument for teaching the facts about language and establishing an attitude toward it which we feel to be fundamental to intelligent reading and effective writing.

Basic English is useful as a self-contained language and as a laboratory course in language for the same reasons. It is a system based on the fact that all words get their meanings from ordinary human actions and human experience. It compels a reduction of flights of language to terms directly descriptive of these actions and experience. Its range and elasticity depend partly on the natural but controlled use of metaphor which is inherent in language. For intelligibility it depends largely on context. The abstractions which are retained in the list are clearly noticeable as abstractions in that company, and can for purposes of analysis be reduced to the simpler terms of the rest of Basic; all other abstractions must be so reduced as they are encountered, and re-translated in terms of each context in which they appear.

[1] See bibliography, Section D, p. 218.

Basic English is, briefly, a system of English devised by C. K. Ogden of Cambridge University and designed originally for international use. It consists of 850 English words, names of things, acts, directions, and qualities, with simple, regular rules for putting them together into smooth English. It is adequate for dealing with the full range of ideas we normally talk about, at a general, descriptive, and nontechnical level. For technical prose, in the physical sciences, for example, a small supplementary list takes Basic to the level of the expert, and gives him a simple and explicit language to be used as the mortar between the bricks of standardized and largely international scientific terms. Its purpose is to give a lucid and simply acquired English for easier comprehension by an international audience without any suggestion of "writing down." As a natural corollary to that, it is also used as a first step for those who are learning English as a foreign language.

Its efficiency for these purposes, and its value in general education, are a result of the way in which the selection of the words was made. In the course of the work on the processes by which words symbolize ideas, feelings, and so on, which both preceded and followed the writing of *The Meaning of Meaning*,[1] it became evident to the authors that the language was a series of layers of increasingly complex substitutions of one sign for another, from the simplest, where a word is used instead of a gesture, and naming takes the place of pointing, to the upper layers, at which a word like *liberty* comes to be used for a state of being, conceived in a variety of different ways, and for the involved assortment of feelings about it. To an extraordinary degree it is possible in English to translate from the ab-

[1] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, fourth edition revised (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936). (Originally published in 1923.)

stract levels into terms several stages nearer to the less am-
biguous operational level. This is both because of the
variety of sources from which the language has grown and
because of its highly developed analytic tendency. Jeremy
Bentham's [1] suggestions about the analysis of abstractions
(fictions), and the discovery that most English verbs could
be replaced by names of physical operations combined with
the direction in which the operation is made or the thing
which is operated on (as "to disembark" is "to go off a
ship") gave further leads which Ogden followed to a new
kind of simplification of language. It was apparent that,
logically, it would be possible to cope with all the ideas
for which we normally use the whole battery of the lan-
guage, in two or three hundred words. But practically that
would be too much of a tax on the analytic powers of most
of us and would not be convenient. So Basic represents a
mean between the usual maximum and the logical mini-
mum—a systematic weeding out of words down to those
close to the level of things and operations in terms of which
the rest may be described or defined. Its words are those
best adapted to giving the plain sense, rather than those
which tend to be more useful for evocative or expressive
purposes. It makes a sort of working division of the never
entirely separable functions of language roughly classified
as "emotive" and "referential."

In suggesting that Basic might perhaps be used profita-
bly in English classes that are exploring the ground cov-
ered by this report, we do not of course imply that it is a
substitute for English, or that students should be limited
to Basic. But the experience of isolated schools and in-
dividuals who have made use of it so far as a tool in lan-
guage study points to fruitful possibilities. The process of
learning Basic itself focuses attention on problems of the

[1] C. K. Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions.*

normal use of language and on its construction, since these are projected visibly in Basic in a compass small enough to be manageable. Grammar, for instance, becomes not a matter of complicated terminology, but a comprehensible and necessary system of putting different classes of words together in a regular order so that they may be intelligible—both the division into classes and the order corresponding to things and acts and relations as they are in life.

The strange fact that Basic has only sixteen verbs brings up other valuable points. For example, an examination of the list suggests that there must be different kinds of words which we call *verbs*. There are, in the first place, the indispensable words for the relatively few fundamental motions we go through every day, such as coming and going, putting and taking, which cannot be reduced a step lower in the scale, unless the act itself is substituted for the words. Then there is another kind which by comparison seem to have become verbs chiefly for convenience—what might be called shorthand expressions for these acts, plus the direction in which they are done, or the thing to which they are done, as *climbing* is fundamentally simply "going up," and *inserting* is "putting in." This sort of very simple analysis is a graphic way of finding out several important things: first, that most words have a composite meaning, and as we go up the scale from direct physical reference, the meaning becomes multiple, so that we are able to talk often about very complicated ideas in a single word; and second, that these words, when they become confusing, can be in a sense de-composed, reduced for purposes of examination to terms a step or two down the scale. Such discoveries, first made with verbs where the ingredients of the shorthand are quite easily seen, prepare the ground for the more difficult but essentially parallel problems of linguistic abstractions (fictions)—why we have them in the language;

how they are indispensable tools for talking about ideas; how they become an accretion, under one symbol, of a large number of ideas and feelings; and how those overloaded symbols may be kept from being a source of confusion by a deliberate process of taking them apart, sifting them through a net of less composite and more easily followed words. At this stage, the use of Basic often becomes complicated and difficult. But earlier practice with the translation of verbs, which is demanded by exercise with Basic, starts a habit of tracing the wanderings of words which may become an almost automatic technique.

Other fundamental ideas about language may begin to take root through this very simple but suggestive process of translating verbs. For example, we have normally a number of material verbs, such as *to paint, to butter, to wax, to dust*. In Basic these are not verb forms, but are included as names of substances. It becomes a matter of "putting paint on the house," "putting butter on the bread," "putting wax on the table." That begins to look like a rule. But, "to dust a table" is surely not "to put dust *on* it." The first point emerges—that there can be no rule about such things, except that the word takes its meaning from the way the act is done in everyday life. "To dust a table" is to take dust off it; but "to dust a dog with flea powder" is to put dust on him.—*To dust*, evidently, has two opposite meanings. How then do we know, when it is used, which of the two is meant? The first answer is obvious —that we know by the situation in which it is used, that is by the context, and the context is not only words printed on a page, but actions, things, people, realities. The second answer is equally fundamental—that one person will understand what another is talking about, that communication will be possible, only when there is some correspondence of experience between the two. Anyone whose experi-

ence with dusting has been concerned only with dogs and flea powder will undoubtedly do the wrong thing if told to dust the furniture. If such points as this are made axiomatic at this simple level, the consternation will be somewhat less acute when problems of dusting give way to problems of "fighting for the national interest."

Translation into Basic will probably prove to be the most productive use of Basic in teaching language. This kind of translation is more disciplined than ordinary paraphrase, because substitution of approximate synonyms is not possible and attention is forcefully directed to important linguistic points which are otherwise often missed. Almost the first question which arises in translation is whether the words may be used metaphorically. It is obvious that if they could not be, Basic could talk about little else than the movement of bodies through space, and in tracing back such rooted metaphors as "I *see* what he was attempting to say," it becomes equally obvious that metaphor is a basic and inherent principle in all language. The old idea of metaphor as ornament is replaced by a new sensitiveness to metaphor as an indispensable vehicle of all communication. Every further moment of translation makes this clearer. When it becomes a question of translating into Basic a meaning conveyed by metaphor in non-Basic words, the effort to find one within Basic which is in a true sense parallel, or the necessity of re-explaining it, forces an awareness of what it is that makes a metaphor work—of what makes a successful metaphor—which is a valuable step toward good writing and discriminating reading.

Basic translations cannot be made a word at a time. The whole sentence must be taken as the unit of thought. Anyone who has worked at translating into Basic will never have to be told that the meaning of any passage of prose

or poetry cannot be got at by a patchwork of dictionary definitions or a string of synonyms. The first requirement is thoroughly to understand the original. The most difficult part of the process of translation into Basic, as often in writing Basic, is not so much the manipulation of the 850 words, as the fine examination of meanings which the use of Basic requires. Non-Basic words, metaphors, abstractions, must be shaken apart and their ingredients sifted, until just those which are necessary in the given context have been separated from the rest. Then the translation may proceed. For all but quite straightforward prose, a number of different Basic versions will emerge. Setting up these alternatives, selecting among them, including some and excluding others as possible parts of the total meaning of the original becomes a nice problem in interpretation. Comparisons of Basic translations with the original English passage from which they were made throw the qualities of the original into sharp relief, always a valuable part of exercises in translating to and from Latin or any foreign language. As Latin, and to some extent other foreign languages, seem to have a tendency to drop out of the modern curriculum, and at present to be performing their function imperfectly, it may be that translation into Basic will offer a practicable substitute. There is in addition a certain increase in control in a situation where translation is being made from the native language, whose associations are familiar and rich and known, into a limited section of that same language, rather than to or from one language which is understood crudely and imperfectly at best.

It seems necessary to repeat here that this discussion is not intended to suggest that students should be confined within the limits of Basic English, except occasionally and for certain definite purposes. We are not advocating the limitation of vocabularies, but we are in favor of increas-

ing sensitivity and conscious control in the use of words known. The evidence suggests that the practice in distilling all possible juice from a small number of words, the discipline which Basic imposes of being explicit without benefit of purple patches, and the exercise of investigating the reflection and refraction which occur between the words within and without the Basic list are such as to make Basic English a helpful tool in teaching to that end.

This reflection and refraction between Basic versions and original passages has two important and seemingly opposite effects. One comes under the general head of "debunking." The other is a sharpening of realization of what it is in the language which we call "power" and "beauty" and "force" and "subtlety."

In the translation of certain types of prose, a number of things become apparent which often slip the attention in ordinary reading. Shifts in the senses of words, warranted and unwarranted, specious reasoning, concealed appeals to the reader's emotions and prejudices, or sheer lack of any assignable meaning at all appear in the process. Most of our illogicalities lie hidden in single words rather than in faults of logical form. Basic is a sharp ferret for a good many of them. As a severely practical language, designed to put across whatever is being talked about clearly and directly, it is more capable of explanation than of implication. It is intended for making statements rather than for evoking feelings. This point, which at first sight seems an impoverishing limitation, is in fact one of its advantages for analytic purposes. By subtracting, as it were, a Basic version of anything from its original, attention is forced on those elements of the original which the Basic leaves out. These will be certain parts of its emotional load, and it is just here that both the riches and the dangers of language are embedded, and that discriminating attention

is therefore much to be desired. A comment made by a schoolboy on a typical piece of advertising which he had turned into Basic is revealing:

> Persuasive quality has dropped out. Tone has changed; dropping out of slang expressions makes it less personal and familiar. Basic version probably a more accurate description; but does not make anybody want to buy anything.

Work with fine prose and poetry is naturally more intricate and must be handled carefully. The making of Basic versions may be helpful in two ways—first as a method of exegesis when there is difficulty as to what the passage is about. The immediate result is not one Basic version as such but a multiple translation to be moved around as letters in an anagram until the pieces finally fit smoothly together in a coherent sense, in which other possible senses which have been weighed are present as parts of the whole. Second, a Basic version, or versions, may be used to reveal to the translator qualities in the original which might otherwise have passed unnoticed. Here are two typical comments of ninth-grade boys upon their own translations of Santayana's sonnet, "O world, thou choosest not the better part!"

> In the translating of this passage into Basic English, the passage gained clarity and simplicity. It is easier to understand and there is no doubt about the words when it is in Basic. On the other hand, the poem loses its whole beauty of rhythm, rhyme, and feeling for the reader when thus translated. It is no more a poem, but becomes a pure uninteresting statement of facts. Before translation it was a thing having beauty of form and movement and sound, and gave the reader a feeling of the mystery connected with knowledge and its use.

In the following, another boy seems to have discovered for himself the idea of intended and legitimate ambiguity,

an idea essential to poetry, which it is often hard to teach
even to advanced students:

> In its translation into Basic English this sonnet has lost all
> its value as a poem and has become prose. It has probably lost a
> great many ideas and different possibilities of interpretation
> which were in the original poem, and it has been confined to
> the one interpretation which the translator had. In the original
> poem the words were probably picked and placed very care-
> fully to impress the reader in certain ways and to make him
> think of different possible meanings and ideas. All this is lost.
> The translation seems to confine the poem.

We do not imply that an auxiliary use of Basic English
is the only way these various points of language may be
made real to students. Clearly there are other methods for
each point. Equally clearly, we are not intending to imply
that Basic English is in any sense a panacea, that it teaches
all that is necessary about language, or that it can be used
profitably without careful consideration, and much time
and thought. We do, however, suggest that its possibilities
for general education can be fully discovered and de-
veloped only through wide experiment, and that its possi-
bilities are such as amply to justify such experiment.

SYSTEMATIC LOGIC

The question will undoubtedly be raised as to the place
of the study of systematic logic in such an approach to lan-
guage as we have suggested. We believe that such a close
study of meanings as we have advocated is more useful than
any specific training in systematic logic at the secondary-
school level. As already pointed out, many of our illogical-
ities and inconsistencies lurk in the words we use rather
than in our logical patterns. Throughout this report we
have stressed the important part played by experience and
actual operations in language. If our discourse has its roots

in living, and can be referred for verification to recognizable experiences in this world as we know it, it is logical. Putting it into syllogistic form will not make it any more or less so; for a logical use of words is no more than a use of words that truthfully represents the world as we know it. Operations are the only basis and authority for even the syllogism itself. If you say, truthfully, that all your green books are on your desk, and if your copy of Keats is a green book, then you should expect to find your copy of Keats on your desk. Your finding it there under these conditions is the only basis of the syllogism. If, on the other hand, this universe were so constituted that under these conditions your copy of Keats turned out to be on the mantelpiece, the Aristotelian system of logic would have to be revised accordingly. It is no divinely inspired, detached system. It simply codifies a certain type of experience. In the use of the syllogism, as in all discourse, logic consists of controlling words so that experience will not be warped in its precarious passage through words. If this art is once learned, intensive training in systematic logic becomes unnecessary. Without it, systematic logic may become a snare for the feet of the unwary, leading to false, meaningless, or tautological conclusions, and lending a false sense of security or conviction that thinking has made progress into new knowledge.

READING SPEEDS

Such is the general interest today in the mechanics of reading, particularly reading speed, that we should perhaps add a few brief notes about the bearing of this report upon that subject. It seems to us questionable practice to train for speed in reading without at the same time giving attention to the techniques of interpretation. Although there

are no experimental data available, we should expect the speed of reading to increase with practice in close interpretation. Certainly it is to be expected that a student who is acquainted with these techniques will have acquired the ability to sort out, by hasty preliminary inspection, passages to be read into those that can be read fast, or "skimmed," and those that require more careful reading or close interpretation. It would seem, indeed, that experience in interpretation would be necessary for making this preliminary sorting.

Such a sorting will vary with the individual reader, his experience, his special training in particular fields, and the purpose for which he is reading. An English teacher, for instance, might have to read a work on science with great care, whereas a trained scientist could possibly "skim" the same book. The scientist, on the other hand, might have a hard struggle with a work on literary criticism which an English teacher could "skim." The purpose of reading is always a compelling factor in the mode of reading. If an English teacher is reading a work on general logic for its bearing upon language, he "skims" or skips entirely certain passages (such as those on the formal syllogism, or parts which are not new to him), and reads carefully parts dealing with words.

Furthermore, in setting the speed for his reading, a reader should know at least as much about the techniques of interpretation as will enable him to understand the author's tone and intent. It is not necessary or desirable to use in all reading, in reading a comparatively light essay, for instance, the heavy guns of interpretation brought up in an attack on a more serious discourse requiring closer interpretation and slower reading. It is important in interpretation to learn just which of the techniques to apply to

any given piece of discourse. In one, a careful study of metaphor will be of primary importance; in another, of definition and shifts of definition; in another, of the attitudes, biases, and prejudices of the author; in another, the emotive charge, and so on for any element or combination of elements of the technique of interpretation. Again, in any piece of discourse, not all the words call for expansion and exposition. It is the part of a good reader to see, in any passage, the comparatively few words the expansion of which is necessary to an examination of the full sense for the purpose in hand. Good reading is always in part a matter of the reader's asking himself the right questions about the passage being read. One of the first questions is generally, "What are the key words?" There can be no rule of thumb for answering this question. They are not always the unusual or "hard" words, the words for which we have to resort to the dictionary. They are not always the long words. They are not even invariably the words that are obviously abstractions. They may be quite innocent-looking words, like *we* and *is* and *necessary*. They are the words in which a shift or ambiguity in sense or tone or feeling would most directly affect the sum of what is being said. In determining which words they are, the full context is the only guide. About these key words, or about the passage as a whole, the most important question to ask is not necessarily, "What is being said?" though this is always the beginning and perhaps the end. Equally important questions for a reader to ask himself in many kinds of discourse are, "How is this being said? With what feelings? For what purposes? In what tone?" Though these processes seem slow to a reader at first, eventually they become almost second nature, so much a part of his reading that they do not slow him down. Reading founded upon preliminary

practice in close reading can become both fast and competent. Fast reading not so based is likely to become merely superficial reading.

It should by this time be clear that what we have in mind is not what is called today "remedial reading." The treatment of "language disability" or "reading disability," as these terms are technically understood, is something that lies entirely outside the province of this report. We propose here not a course for the cure of students who "have trouble with language," but a point of view for the consideration of teachers of all students in all subjects. Indeed, where "language disability" exists, very probably purely remedial work would have to be undertaken before a student would be fully ready for the kind of approach to language which we advocate. Almost certainly where the basis of the disability is physiological this would be so. To look to this approach to language for a panacea or even a means of treatment of the abnormal or retarded student is entirely to misinterpret this report.

MEANS AND ENDS

In the frequent use of the word *exercise* in the foregoing we do not wish to give the impression that the teacher of language should impose upon his students set pieces, fabricated in advance without reference to anything that they are doing, or have done, or are interested in doing. Language teaching can be, and usually is, the most difficult work that teacher and class undertake. The motivation of the class, always of highest importance, here is indispensable. Hence, the "exercises" we have suggested cannot be successfully given out of a clear sky. They are not intended as setting-up exercises or drills; undertaken in that spirit, they will prove to have very little carry-over or transfer

value into the other work of the student. The "exercises" we have suggested are intended merely to indicate the type of work that a teacher may undertake with a class in the study of language. But whatever work in language is undertaken should grow directly out of the students' interests and occupations. Language study is not a "discipline" imposed from without, but a vital help to a class in successful performance of what it is doing, wishes to do, and sees it needs to do in all activities in which language is involved. A teacher cannot drive a group through a set "language course" based upon the theories we have advanced, a course detached from anything else they are doing, and hope for success; he is more likely to broaden in the student's mind the gap between life and language, which it should be one of his chief objectives to close.

The teacher should, rather, have formulated the elements of language and its workings that he eventually wishes to teach; then he must seize upon any opportunity afforded by the work and interests of the class to fill in a point here and a point there, tying language up to the work in hand. This is especially true of the early stages of language study. A teacher versed in the operations of language, and alert to opportunity as it comes, eventually builds up the kind of ability in dealing with language that we advocate. As this ability grows, and as some of the theory upon which it is based gradually emerges, an interest in language itself, as such, is likely to be aroused, just as in other subjects students become interested in physiology, light, or international relations. When this point is reached, a study of language provides its own motivation; students see it as a fascinating field of research, and as a matter of vital importance to their living. It is only when this occurs that the complete study can be rounded out and more or less systematized, or that exercises interesting only for the

linguistic points they illustrate can be introduced with profit. Members of a class can then, at times, devise such exercises for one another.

Even then, however, the situation has to be carefully watched. Long concentration on language by itself is likely to become dull; it is better to stop for a time while the students still clamor for more. Too long a concentrated study, moreover, is likely to defeat its own ends by becoming over-theoretical, hair-splitting, and far removed from everyday living. Theoretical study should, then, be alternated with other work, in which the student will have an opportunity to make his own practical applications, as he is likely to do if the theoretical study has not been pushed to the point where his interest in it has lost its edge, or to the point where it has little or no connection with anything else in his life.

This admonition should not prove to be any barrier to a resourceful teacher. If, as we contend, language is an inextricable part of the everyday existence of all of us, the materials and the motivation for the teaching of language lie ready to his hand.

Much has been said in this report about the necessity today of the student's being given the ability to detect propaganda; about the kinds of discourse in which his emotions are played upon in an attempt to get him to adopt certain attitudes; about writers who cleverly disguise their own real feelings and convictions and try to create in the reader feelings and convictions that will lead to action serving the ends of the writer or his employers, regardless of the interests of the reader. This subject is today much in the public mind. It would be excusable for a general reader of this report, or even for a teacher, beset as we are with propaganda and propaganda against propaganda, to look upon our analysis of language and its teaching as en-

tirely, or even as mainly, something that offers a ready and promising method for "debunking." Certainly the ability to detect sham, where it occurs, should be one of the fruits of such a study of language as we have sketched. But it would not be the only fruit, nor indeed the greatest and richest. Even if all forms of linguistic legerdemain were completely to cease, there would still be the problem of communication, of establishing through words the communion of mind with mind. What we have here suggested is only incidentally a process for detection of fraud. Most of what we read and hear is still, fortunately, written and spoken in good faith. We advocate attention to language not primarily as a method of exposing the shoddy, but as a means of arriving at a more nearly perfect understanding of the sincere, whether it appear in our daily conversations and current reading, or in our dealing, through literature, with the great and eternal work of scientists, philosophers, poets; with the work of all writers who in their own time and in their own way have tried to interpret for themselves and others this world as they have known it. To view language with any less broad outlook than this is entirely to fail to visualize its tremendous potentialities in education, and its vital position in the life of the individual and in civilization itself.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books and articles are suggested as readings for teachers who are attempting to use *Language in General Education*. The bibliography is merely suggestive. Because many universities offer excellent courses on changes in the English language, references in that field are limited to a few designed to stimulate interest.

A. *General*

ELLIS, Havelock, *The Dance of Life*, New edition (New York, The Modern Library, 1929), xiv + 363 pp. See Chapters I and IV. To those who are bound with the feeling that language is something out of a textbook, this reference may give a new point of view.

CHASE, Stuart, *The Tyranny of Words* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), xiv + 396 pp. This book, full of contradictions, and lacking in complete understanding of the problem, still offers some stimulation to the teacher who has been conventional in his approach to teaching English. It may be used in comparison with the position of Richards. Many might become aware of Richards' meanings through attempting to discover whether or not Chase had Richards' point of view.

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KORZYBSKI, Alfred, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (Lancaster, Pa. and New York City, The International non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Co., The Science Press Printing Co., Distributors, 1933), xx + 798 pp. The general reader will find this book far more than an "introduction." It is a detailed and in places a technical treatise upon the psychology and psychiatry of language.

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Ltd., 1937), xvi + 295 pp. An examination of the philosophical views of Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans, this book supplements *A Modern Introduction to Logic.*

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D. *Basic English* [1]

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[1] Barnes and Noble, New York City, generally carry a full stock of the Basic books.

INDEX

Words set in *italics* refer to words discussed in some detail in the text. The selection of these words has of necessity been arbitrary. By paging through the book the reader will find many other words used as examples.